NATION

Monks assaulted in WB, leads to political row

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BUSINESS

Red Sea crisis: Commerce min calls meet on 17 Jan

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SPORTS

Satwik-Chirag one step away from 2nd Super 1000 title

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Kharge named INDIA chief, Nitish declines convener post

A virtual meet of INDIA was held to review seat-sharing agenda

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Consensus emerged on the appointment of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as the chairperson of the opposition INDIA bloc. Meanwhile, JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar's name was also proposed for the convener's post at the alliance meeting on Saturday but a final call will be taken after consulting the parties whose representatives were not present in the meeting, the, according to sources.

Leaders of the INDIA bloc participated in the meeting via video conferencing where they discussed various aspects of the alliance like seat-sharing and preparations for the Lok Sabha elections, due in April-May. The sources said leaders of the Trinamool Congress, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the Samajwadi Party did not attend the meeting.

Mallikarjun Kharge ***PHOTO: PTI***

- The sources said leaders of the Trinamool Congress, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the Samajwadi Party did not attend the meeting.

Many see the alliance chairperson and convener having an upper hand in the race for the prime ministerial candidate, but leaders of various parties maintained that the PM candidate of the INDIA bloc would be decided only after the elections.

Nitish was of the view that a team of party chiefs should be formed and that there is no need to appoint a convenor.

Sources added that talks are continuing between Kharge and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee as also with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

NCP Chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray have said that there is no dispute over the issue.

Sources said the alliance leaders would be meeting physically soon later in the month to chalk out further plans.

In the evening, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal also met Kharge at his residence, where Rahul Gandhi was also present. AAP leader Raghav Chadha also attended the talks which related to seat-sharing between the two parties, the sources said.

"I, along with Rahul Gandhi nvited all INDIA Parties to join 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' at their convenience and use the opportunity to raise the social, political and economic issues plaguing common people of this country," he said.

JD(U) national general secretary Sanjay Kumar Jha, said Kumar had "so far not given approval" to the offer which will be deliberated upon within the party even as he claimed that the Bihar Chief Minister was in favour of a Congress leader becoming the chairperson.

Trinamool Congress on Saturday affirmed its commitment to the alliance but said that Congress should recognise its limitations in West Bengal and permit the party to spearhead the political battle in it. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

4 in 10 IT professionals fall victim to cybercrime in City

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Around four out of 10 victims reporting cybercrime at Cyber Economic and Narcotics (CEN) police stations in Bengaluru are IT professionals, according to City Crime Records Bureau data. Salar News dug deep into how cybercriminals manipulate people, their modus operandi and how one can keep cybercriminals at bay.

>>>Full report on Page 2

Karnataka gives nod to 73 projects worth Rs 3,900 cr

BENGALURU, 12 JAN

Karnataka's State-Level Single Window Clearance Committee headed by Minister MB Patil has granted approval to 73 projects worth Rs 3,935.52 crore. The projects are expected to generate employment for nearly 15,000 people, according to a statement. Proposals submitted by Bengaluru-based companies -- ETL Secure Space Limited, and DhaSH PV Technologies Private Limited -- which are going to invest Rs 490.5 crore and Rs 346.35 crore respectively were among the marquis projects greenlighted by the panel. Patil, the minister for Large and Medium Industries, and Infrastructure Development said the projects that received a nod would ensure equitable investment across the diverse regions of the state. *—PTI*

Union Min attacks Shankaracharyas over Ram Temple

PALGHAR, 13 JAN

Union Minister Narayan Rane on Saturday said the Shankaracharyas should bless the Ram Temple instead of criticising some aspects and accused them of looking at Prime Minister Narendra Modi from a "political angle". Speaking to reporters here, he also said the Shankaracharyas must spell out their contribution to society and Hinduism. Asked about Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray stating that President Droupadi Murmu must inaugurate the Ram Temple, Rane said he would not comment on someone who has no job and sits at home. Rane claimed Thackeray's faction would take a further hit as "eight out of 16 MLAs are approaching us BJP. *—PTI*

Body of missing man recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, 13 JAN

The body of a person who went missing on 10 January was found by security forces in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Saturday. Dara Singh of Akasoi in Bishnupur district had gone missing along with three others from a hill in nearby Churachandpur district where they had gone to collect firewood on Wednesday, officials said. According to police, Singh's bullet-ridden body has been sent to RIMS hospital for post-mortem. The bodies of the three others were recovered from Haotak Phailen in Churachandpur district on Thursday last, officials said, adding the body of Dara Singh was found some 150 metre away from the place where the other bodies were found. The three others people are Ibomcha Singh, 51, and his son Anand Singh, 20, and 38-year-old Romen Singh. *—PTI*

India protests UK envoy's visit to PoK

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

India has registered a strong protest with the UK over the visit to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) by its High Commissioner to Islamabad along with another British official.

The ministry of external affairs said such "infringement" of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity is "unacceptable".

"India has taken a serious note of the highly objectionable visit of the British High Commissioner in Islamabad, along with a UK Foreign Office official, to Pakistan occupied Kashmir on January 10," it said. "Foreign Secretary has lodged a strong protest with the British High Commissioner in India on this infringement," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

British High Commissioner Jane Marriott visited Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Wednesday ***PHOTO: X***

"The Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are, have been and shall always remain an integral part of India," it said. The handle of the British High Commission in Pakistan also shared a video of Marriott's visit to the area, which showed her going to a bakery. *—PTI*

2 held for making fake Mysore sandal soaps

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Two people in Hyderabad were arrested on Saturday for making and selling counterfeits of Karanataka Soap & Detergents Ltd (KSDL)'s Mysore sandal soap. KSDL is owned by Karnataka government.

A forgery case has been filed against the accused Rakesh Jain and Mahaveer Jain Police have recovered goods worth Rs 2 crore including fake products and carton boxes used for their packaging.

The seized items include 20 cartons containing 1,800 pieces of 150 g, 47 cartons with 9,400 pieces of 75g soap, and 400 empty packaging boxes for both 150 g and 75 g soap packs.

Reportedly, the counterfeit unit was producing 400 carton boxes.

PHOTO: SALAR

The investigation began after an anonymous call alerted KSDL President MB Patil about the circulation of fake Mysore sandal soaps in Hyderabad market. The KSDL team purchased a batch of the fake product worth Rs 1 lakh and later placed an order worth Rs 25 lakh to uncover the manufacturing unit. *—Salar News*

WHERE DO WE GO?

Roadside vendors protest with vegetables after BBMP cleared their stalls from footpaths, in Jayanagar, Bengaluru, on Saturday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

ED ISSUES 4TH SUMMON TO KEJRI IN EXCISE CASE

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

After he failed to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Chief Minister Arvind Kejri wal has been summoned for the fourth time in less than three months by the agency for questioning on 18 January in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case, official sources said on Saturday.

The 55-year-old Aam Aadmi Party convenor had refused to depose before the ED for the third time on 3 January, citing Rajya Sabha polls and Republic Day preparations. He had also questioned the motive behind the ED's actions, citing legal "objections" to the summons and accusing the agency of assuming the role of "judge, jury and executioner". By issuing the fresh notice, the ED has again rejected Kejriwal's contention that the summonses issued to him were "not in consonance with the law" and hence should be withdrawn. AAP alleged on Saturday that the BJP is "misusing" the ED to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as it raised the issue of the timing of the summons, noting that Kejriwal is scheduled to visit Goa from 18 January to interact with party leaders and volunteers. When asked if Kejriwal would appear before the ED this time, Gopal Rai said they are consulting advisors. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

MALDIVES-INDIA ROW

Doesn't give you licence to bully us: Muizzu

BEIJING/MALE, 13 JAN

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu on Saturday struck a defiant note saying that his country may be small but "doesn't give anyone the license to bully us".

He returned home after a five-day high-profile state visit to China,

His comments came amid a diplomatic row with India over derogatory social media posts by three of his ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Though we have small islands in this ocean, we have a vast exclusive economic zone of 900,000 square km. Maldives is one of the countries with the biggest share of this ocean," he said.

During his visit to China, Muizzu held talks with President Xi Jinping after which the two countries signed 20 agreements.

Muizzu said China has granted USD 130 million in assistance for his country.

Muizzu said the bulk of the USD 130 million assistance will be spent on redeveloping the roads in Male, where the mayor election is being held on Saturday.

Also, China's Ambassador to Maldives Wang Lixin said Maldives will receive support for more development projects from Beijing if they align with President Xi's initiatives.

Mohamed Muizzu ***PHOTO: AP***

Wang, who accompanied Muizzu on his visit to China, said there are three key factors to the strong relations between Maldives and China.

Muizzu's visit to China was marred by the diplomatic row with India over derogatory remarks by his ministers against Prime Minister Modi and the release of a report by the EU Election Observation Mission of Maldives that said the ruling coalition of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the People's National Congress (PNC) deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation in the 2023 presidential elections in which Muizzu won. *—PTI*

Deve Gowda will not contest LS polls

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Former prime minister and JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda on Saturday announced that he will not be contesting for the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections.

Gowda said, "I am 91 years old and have two years left as a Rajya Sabha member." But he will campaign for JD(S) and BJP in the elections.

The JD(S) leader said his son HD Kumaraswamy has not decided on contesting. "We will follow the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

HD Deve Gowda ***PHOTO: PTI***

Dismissing rumours that Manjunath might contest from Hassan seat in Lok Sabha elections, Gowda hinted that his grandson Prajwal Revanna will compete from the constituency

About the consecration of Ram Temple, Gowda said Siddaramaiah should visit Lord Ram in Ayodhya if he can't go on the inauguration day, 22 January

'Only Modi can solve Cauvery crisis'

Gowda said injustice has been meted out to the State and only Modi, "who is set to become Prime Minister again" can solve the Cauvery issue. Gowda said he would be going to Delhi on 1 February to attend the Rajya Sabha session where he will raise the Cauvery issue in Parliament. "I will request Modi to intervene in the Cauvery issue," Gowda said. He vowed that he would fight for the Cauvery cause till his last breath. *—Salar News*

B'luru to get booths for menstruating women

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that he will implement ideas such as integrating ambulances to traffic signals, pink booths in public places to help menstruating women and separate disposal of floral and vegetable waste that he received from the Youth Ideathon for Brand Bengaluru.

The inter-school Ideathon 2023 and Youth Leadership Summit 2023 started a month ago in Bengaluru's schools. In the first stage, 50 schools were selected which were narrowed down to 25 in the second stage. Eventually, seven schools were shortlisted for grand finale held at Hotel Conrad, Bengaluru.

Shivakumar said, "The school students have given some great suggestions for Brand Bengaluru through this Youth Ideathon. Leadership is not just limited to political class. Youth have leadership capabilities but you need to develop it further in whichever field you choose."

Shivakumar added, "This event is just the beginning. I will advise the BBMP Commissioner to organize such events at school level," he said.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the government has developed an app to replenish the City's greenery. The app 'Hasiru Rakshaka' encourages students to plant trees. "We have also decided to delegate management of parks to residents," he noted. *—Salar News*

CLIMATE CRISIS IS HERE

'2023 warmest year on record by huge margin'

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has officially confirmed that 2023 is the hottest year on record by a huge margin, smashing global temperature records.

The yearly average global temperature approached 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, which is significant because the Paris Agreement on climate change aims to limit the long-term temperature increase to no more than the same amount.

Global temperatures in every month between June and December set new monthly records, with July and August registering as the hottest months on record, it said.

"Climate change is the biggest challenge that humanity faces. It is affecting all of us, especially the most vulnerable," said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo.

The yearly average global temperature approached 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels ***PHOTO: PTI***

"We cannot afford to wait any longer. We have to make drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources."

She said the temperature rise recorded globally reflected the mid-2023 shift from cooling effects brought about by the climate driver La Nina to the warming effects of El Nino. "Given that El Nino usually has the biggest impact on global temperatures after it peaks, 2024 could be even hotter," said Saulo

"Climate change is escalating, and this is unequivocal because of human activities. The climate crisis is worsening the inequality crisis. It affects all aspects of sustainable development and undermines efforts to tackle poverty, hunger, ill-health, displacement, and environmental degradation," said Saulo.

WMO went on to say that since the 1980s, each decade had been getting progressively warmer, with the past nine years being the warmest on record.

The statement said that sea surface temperatures remained exceptionally high for much of the year, which were accompanied by severe and damaging marine heatwaves.

Further, the sea ice extent in Antarctica registered its lowest measure ever, both for the end-of-summer minimum in February and end-of-winter maximum in September, the agency said.

All these long-term climate changes expressed themselves in the daily weather, it said, with the extreme heat impacting health and fuelling devastating wildfires.

Intense rainfall, floods, rapidly intensifying tropical cyclones left a trail of destruction, death and huge economic losses, it said *—PTI*

CRIME BEAT

Woman, lover kill husband, pass it off as heart attack

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

A woman and her lover were arrested at HSR Layout here on Saturday on charges of killing her husband after projecting the death as a heart attack. Nandini Bai was married to 30-year-old Venkata Nayak. Nandini was allegedly in a relationship with Nitish. On Tuesday, when Nayak went out Nandini called Nitish to her home. When Nayak returned home, he saw Nitish in the apartment. An argument ensued and in between the fight, Nandini and Nitesh hit the victim on his head, leading to his death. They dragged his body and placed it in the toilet. Nandini later called the police and informed them that her husband had collapsed in the toilet and died after he hit his head on a stone. The case was initially registered under unnatural death. However, the post-mortem and preliminary investigations revealed that this was a murder and not a natural death. When the police interrogated Nandini, she confessed to her crime. She revealed that she and Nitesh were childhood friends and hailed from Sathya Sai region in Andhra Pradesh. They developed an affair and Nitesh would come down whenever her husband was not around. *—Salar News*

CCB raid reveals betting racket in B'luru Turf Club

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Sixty bookies, who were arrested by Central Crime Branch (CCB) after a raid in Bengaluru Turf Club, were released on bail on Saturday. Exposing an illegal betting racket, the search operations carried out by CCB began on Friday afternoon and concluded around 1am on Saturday. The sleuths seized Rs 3.47 crore of unaccounted cash from the club. The raid was prompted by complaints of irregularities, including tax evasion, illegal betting and selling tickets at inflated prices. A total of 26 licenced bookies operate at the club and an FIR has been filed against the unlicensed bookies in High Grounds Police station. The bookies have been summoned and asked to provide documents related to the unaccounted cash. In December 2019, Rs 96 lakh in unaccounted cash was seized from the club. Illegal betting is reportedly thriving at the turf club, fuelled by high taxes on legal winnings. The winner of a legal bet is required to pay 28% GST on their winnings. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

'Ram came in my dream & objected to BJP's politics'

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Labour Minister Santosh Lad has claimed that Lord Ram appeared in his dream, expressing disapproval of BJP using Ram Temple issue for political gains. "Lord Ram came in my dream last night (Friday) and asked me to convey to BJP that he is God to all and not only to BJP alone," Lad said in Dharwad. Hitting out at BJP over the timing of the consecration, the Congress leader questioned why the Ram Temple became a prominent issue just before the Lok Sabha elections. BJP was exploiting the temple issue for political gain and votes, he said. Lad noted that a Shankaracharya seer said the temple's inauguration should only happen after its completion. Criticising BJP for not addressing Shankaracharya's concerns, Lad questioned Prime Minister Modi's role in the Ram Temple struggle. Lad said neither he nor Chief Minister Siddaramaiah received an invitation to attend the temple consecration. *—PTI*

4 in 10 IT workers fall victim to cybercrime

Last year, the City reported 17,623 cybercrime cases, of which only 1,271 were detected

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Around four out of 10 victims reporting cybercrime at Cyber Economic and Narcotics (CEN) police stations in Bengaluru are IT professionals, according to City Crime Records Bureau data obtained by **Salar News**.

Last year, the City reported 17,623 cybercrime cases, of which only 1,271 were detected. At least 14,285 cases are still untraced. A majority of these cases directly or indirectly involve IT professionals and this reflects the vulnerability of people working in the Silicon Valley of India.

Bengaluru tops the list of cybercrimes registered across all metro cities in India. Social engineers are cybercriminals who use sounds resembling police stations or government offices during phone calls, tricking victims into complying with fraudulent requests, resulting in financial losses.

Praveen Kumar, an inspector with Bengaluru Cybercrime, Economic Offences and Narcotics (CEN) wing, narrated a cyber scam he experienced. "A hacker convinced a victim to transfer the money to 50 bank accounts." Upon reaching out to the victims, Salar News found that hackers are sophisticated storytellers who craft virtual scenarios to trap victims.

Luring victims with WFH opportunities

Ananya (name changed), a 23-year-old from the City who fell victim to job fraud, shared her experience. "I received a text message from an unknown number offering work-from-home opportunities. I applied, and the employer asked me to give reviews on Google, promising a payment of Rs 150 per review. Later, I was added to a Telegram channel where I was assigned three tasks: the first was giving Google reviews, and the second and third involved Bitcoin and cryptocurrency. The unidentified person paid me for the Google review, and I moved on to the next task, which was online trading. The person then informed me that due to my low credit score, the transaction would be difficult. They suggested I invest in a Bitcoin app, promising to return my investment and provide extra payment upon task completion."

Ananya agreed and invested Rs 1.5 lakh; she was later asked to pay Rs 1.5 lakh more. The total amount she was promised was Rs 3.5 lakh. She eventually realised that she had been scammed.

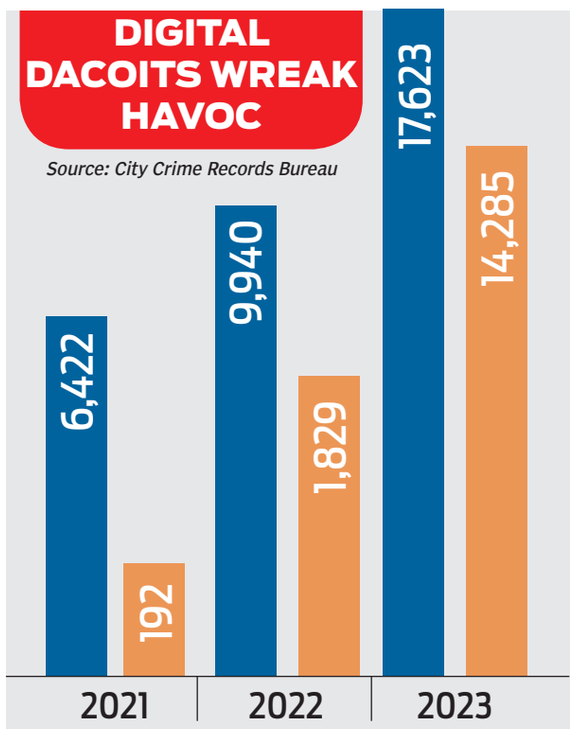
Modus operandi

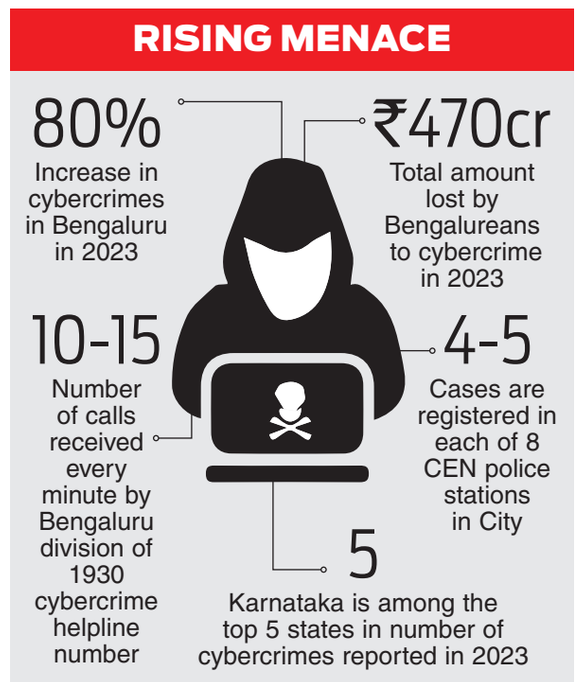
Cybercriminals employ various tactics to conceal their identities and locations. One method involves using virtual private networks (VPNs) or proxy servers to route their internet traffic through different locations, creating layers of anonymity. Hackers often utilise SIM cards from one state while operating in another, and they may use stolen phones and SIM cards, making it challenging to identify and trace the perpetrators given the lack of resources for the cybercrime officers in other states, the CEN Inspector said. *—Salar News*

At least 14,285 cases are still untraced **PHOTO: PTI**

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

- A majority of these cases directly or indirectly involve IT professionals and this reflects the vulnerability of people working in City




RISING MENACE
80%
Increase in cybercrimes in Bengaluru in 2023
₹470cr
Total amount lost by Bengalureans to cybercrime in 2023
10-15
Number of calls received every minute by Bengaluru division of 1930 cybercrime helpline number
4-5
Cases are registered in each of 8 CEN police stations in City
5
Karnataka is among the top 5 states in number of cybercrimes reported in 2023

PROTECT YOURSELF

1. Verification is key
- Always verify the status of any package directly on the official website.
- Never click on links received via SMS, email, or WhatsApp without verification.

2. Guard sensitive information
- Never share UPI PIN, UPI ID or bank details.

3. End suspicious calls promptly
- If a call raises suspicions, end the call immediately without divulging any personal information.

4. Swift reporting
- If you have been a victim, immediately file a complaint by dialling **112** or **1930**. Lodge a complaint with Cyber Crime Police Station.

From job fraud to FedEx scam

'1930' is the helpline to report cybercrimes. When Salar News visited the office on Infantry Road, there were at least 250 people answering 10-15 distress calls per minute. The City sees 4-5 cases at 8 CEN police stations. Job frauds constitute 60 per cent of cyber scams, while FedEx scams and Aadhaar-related scams make up 20 per cent each. In 2023, a company siphoned off Rs 6 crore from many, according to CEN police wing. In 2023, Bengaluru Police recorded 263 FedEx scam cases, amounting to Rs 5 crore loss. The victim gets a call from FedEx 'customer service' about a package that has illegal items. They are then told to pay a hefty fine. In 2023, a PhD student at Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, lost Rs 1.3 crore to this. Another scam involves impersonating officials from Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). An Infosys techie lost Rs 3.7 crore. These fraudsters claim that mobile numbers will be disconnected for sending unsolicited messages. *—Salar News*

AI will monitor traffic violations

Home Minister G Parameshwara, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar at the Road Safety Month- 2024 event at Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Artificial intelligence would be used to monitor traffic violations in City, said Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at an event to mark National Road Safety Month-2024 at Kanteerava Stadium here on Saturday.

More than 6,000 driving licences were suspended in the last 3 years in State for traffic violations. Most of the accident deaths occur involve two-wheelers, according to National Crime Records Bureau's statistics.

The youth should follow traffic rules and two-wheeler riders should wear helmets, Shivakumar said.

"Earlier, our Congress government had implemented Mukhyamantri Santwana Harish Yojana to provide immediate treatment to those injured in accidents," Shivakumar said.

Regarding the traffic congestion across the City, the minister said, "As many as 1.30 lakh families live in Bengaluru and more than 55 lakh vehicle movements are recorded every day. Transport Department, BBMP and police departments are working together to create a programme to ease traffic congestion. We are studying the projects running in other countries to alleviate traffic congestion to implement them here."

About the street vendors facing eviction protesting in the City, the KPCC President said, "As per the High Court orders and for the convenience of pedestrians, the traders along the footpath have been cleared. These traders will be registered and allowed to do business on push carts on one side of the road. We are also willing to provide financial assistance to them."

The footpath traders who were looking for booming business because of Makara Sankranti were evicted from footpaths on Friday evening.

About BJP leaders' criticism that there is no safety and security in the State, he said, "They are saying what happened in their time. We will not encourage moral policing at any stage." *—Salar News*

Traffic cops' AI-based app

Bengaluru traffic police on Saturday launched artificial intelligence (AI)-backed ASTraM app. ASTraM (Actionable Intelligence for Suitable Traffic Management) will include a BOT reporting accidents, congestion alerts and track ambulances. This data will be used by map services which will guide the public with real-time information. Traffic officials will receive an alert on the congestion in their jurisdiction every 15 minutes. *—Salar News*

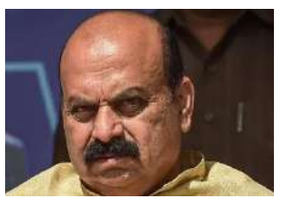
BOMMAI DEMANDS SIT PROBE INTO HAVERI GANG-RAPE CASE

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Saturday urged Congress to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct a probe into the Haveri gang rape and moral policing cases.

He accused Congress of trying to appease a section of people in the State by not imposing law and order.

Addressing a press conference, Bommai said, "Crime against women in Bengaluru has increased by 30 per cent compared to last year. Many cases are being closed as the police are acting like mute spectators, and if they initiate action as per law, they are facing the backlash by the government."



Basavaraj Bommai **PHOTO: PTI**

He said that BJP women's delegation is going to visit Hanagal on Sunday.

Seven men had barged into a hotel room and attacked the couple at Hangal in Haveri. The survivor alleged that she was gang raped by the attackers.

Bommai accused politicians of pressurising police to cover up the rape cases. He said, "The moral policing cases are on the rise in the state. When I called and questioned the Superintendent of Police, he denied the incident. In the FIR, there is no record of gang rape. Three of the six accused have not yet been arrested."

Firing a fresh salvo at G Parameshwara, Bommai said, "The Home Minister said that he has given standard instructions. Are the police instructed to file a case based on a person's community?"

"Congress claims to be the protector of minorities but minority girls are being raped. Who is the Congress protecting?" Bommai asked.

Bommai also demanded anti-communal cells in the State. *—Salar News*

'No crimes against women during BJP rule?'

Bengaluru, 13 Jan

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Saturday sought to know whether there were no atrocities committed on women during BJP rule in the state. BJP Congress of sleeping over incidents of crime against women. His reaction comes in the wake of the alleged gang rape of a Muslim woman over her interfaith relationship.

Sumalatha **PHOTO: SALAR**

WILL SUMALATHA STICK WITH BJP OR GO SOLO?

MANDYA, 13 JAN

As the Lok Sabha elections draw closer, Mandya Lok Sabha constituency becomes a focal point of political interest in State. Speculation surrounds the allocation of the Mandya ticket, with indications pointing towards the JD(S) receiving the ticket as part of the alliance with BJP. Amidst this uncertainty, MP Sumalatha Ambareesh finds herself in a dilemma, as there are doubts about her candidacy with BJP in the upcoming elections.

Sumalatha, who had expressed support for the BJP after becoming an MP, is reportedly upset with the party for not considering her for the Mandya constituency.

Faced with the prospect of not securing a BJP ticket, Sumalatha is contemplating running as a non-party candidate. Meanwhile, the Congress high command is devising a strategy to attract Sumalatha into its fold. With the Congress struggling to find a suitable candidate for the Mandya constituency, there are plans to field Sumalatha as a Congress candidate. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has reportedly backed Sumalatha's candidacy. *—Salar News*

HC issues summons to Muruga Mutt CEO

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

High Court has issued a summons to businessman M Bharat Kumar, who serves as Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of Chitradurga Muruga Mutt's SJM Vidyapeetha. He faces charges of criminal contempt of court for alleged interference in the transfer of district judges.

The criminal contempt case was initiated by Registrar General of the High Court. The background of the case starts with the arrest of mutt seer Shivamurthy Murugha Sharanaru under sections of Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act in September 2022. After being charged in the sexual harassment case, Sharanaru appointed M Bharat Kumar as the managing officer of SJM Vidyapeetha on 2 December, 2022. But, State government appointed retired IAS officer PS Vastrada as the administrator of the mutt on 13 December, 2022.

Basavaprabhu Swamiji, the temporary caretaker of the mutt, and devotees challenged the appointment of the Government Administrator. Vastrada was relieved from the post after six months. *—Salar News*

156-yr-old school makes way for parking lot

HUBBALLI, 13 JAN

Government Kannada Boys' School in Hubballi, which has a legacy spanning 156 years and the distinction of being the second school in State with the highest number of students, is now on the brink of demolition.

The decision by government officials and elected representatives to demolish the school and make way for a multiplex parking lot has sparked outrage among alumni and teachers who hold sentimental ties to the institution.

Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation has evacuated the school premises to make room for a multiplex parking facility for Rs 18 crore.

The new parking lot was proposed as the existing parking system in the city's glasshouse, which was constructed for Rs 4.30 crore in the city's glasshouse, started deteriorating.

A resolution to demolish the school was discussed in a meeting of corporation officials and legislators. Concerned at the development, alumni have initiated a signature collection campaign to appeal against the decision. *—Salar News*

MONSTER MOM

Watertight case against startup CEO: Goa DGP

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Suchana Seth, the CEO of a Bengaluru-based AI startup who allegedly killed her four-year-old son, buckled under pressure and started to cooperate with probe on Saturday after being a tough nut to crack in the interrogation till the day before, Jaspal Singh, Director General of Police, Goa, told Salar News.

Suchana, who was named as 100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics list, is exhibiting shrewdness during the investigation, police said.

"We have a watertight case in hand and my team is working around the clock. We will ensure that justice is meted out to the child," Singh told **Salar News** in a phone interview from Goa Police Headquarters in Panaji on Saturday.

Suchana, a 39-year-old entrepreneur from Bengaluru, had tried to harm herself after allegedly killing her son. Bloodstains found at the murder scene in Goa belonged to Suchana and she may have tried to slit her wrists after committing the crime, the top cop said. After killing her son, Suchana had attempted to hide the body in a bag filled with toys and clothes, police said. She wrote a note with eyeliner and left it in a bag with her son's body, they added. On Friday, she was taken by Calangute police to the apartment hotel at Candolim where the crime took place to 'recreate' the crime scene. Suchana was given an object the size of her son, to show the police how she packed the body into a bag. Suchana also showed the scissors with which she had cut her wrist.

Suchana continues to deny that she killed her son, they said.

Nidhin Valsan, Superintendent of Police, Goa, who is heading the investigation, said: "The case is pending investigation and I will not be able to comment." *—Salar News*

Suchana Seth **PHOTO: PTI**

'BJP misusing ED to stop Kejri from LS polls campaigning'

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The BJP is "misusing" the ED to stop Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from campaigning for Lok Sabha polls, Environment Minister Gopal Rai said after the probe agency sent its fourth summons to the AAP Chief on Saturday.Addressing a press conference, Rai questioned the timing of the Enforcement Directorate's summons to Kejriwal, saying it came ahead of his Goa tour from January 18."The ED should refrain from becoming a political weapon of the BJP," Delhi's environment minister said.Rai also alleged that the news of the summons had already been leaked to media before it reached the Delhi Chief Minister. Asked if Kejriwal would appear before the ED this time, Rai said they are consulting legal advisors and would act accordingly. The Enforcement Directorate has issued summons to Kejriwal for the fourth time for questioning in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case. *—PTI*

Deora dismisses speculation about quitting Cong

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Senior Congress leader Milind Deora on Saturday dismissed as "rumours" the speculation that he was on his way out and would join the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Deora, who recently made his displeasure over the Shiv Sena (UBT) staking a claim to the Mumbai South Lok Sabha constituency public, however, told reporters that he is holding discussions with his supporters. "I am listening to my supporters...Haven't taken a decision yet," the former Mumbai South MP said when asked if he was chalking out a plan with his supporters.These are rumours, he said while responding to a query on reports in some sections of the media that he was quitting the Congress to join the Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde. The Uddhav Thackeray-led group had staked a claim to contest the Mumbai South constituency, represented by Deora before 2014, in the upcoming general elections, which has not gone down well with Congress leader. *—PTI*

Ex- U'khand CM to skip Ram temple consecration event

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Senior Congress leader and former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat on Saturday said he would not attend the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. "Ram is our faith, our everything. As per the Sanatan tradition, we will go whenever the lord summons us. Why will anyone go on the invitation of BJP or RSS? The whole event has been saffronised by these organisations," Rawat told reporters here.Rawat said the consecration ceremony should not have been made to appear as an event of the BJP and RSS as it is being done. *—PTI*

Parliament security breach: Court sends accused to custody

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

A Delhi court on Saturday sent the six accused arrested in connection with the Parliament security breach case to judicial custody till January 27.

Additional Sessions Judge Hardeep Kaur remanded Manoranjan D, Sagar Sharma, Lalit Jha, Amol Shinde, Mahesh Kumawat and Neelam Azad in judicial custody after they were produced before the court on expiry of their police remand.

The judge passed the order on an application moved by Delhi police seeking judicial custody of all the accused as the investigation was ongoing.

During the hearing, accused Neelam Azad alleged before the court that a woman officer forcibly made her sign over 50 blank papers on Friday.

Special Public Prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh objected to the allegations and submissions of the accused. The court recorded the submissions of both sides.

In a major security breach on

'No need to project any face in INDIA'

He said INDIA PM candidate will be selected after LS poll

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

NCP President Sharad Pawar on Saturday asserted that there was no dispute among the INDIA bloc members over appointing its convenor, but said there was no need to project any face for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as the leader can be chosen once the results are declared.

He said that during a virtual meeting of INDIA bloc leaders held on Saturday, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's name was suggested for the post of convenor, but the latter was of the view that a team of party chiefs should be formed and that there is no need to appoint a convenor.

During the virtual meeting, the INDIA bloc leaders discussed various aspects of the alliance and the preparations for the Lok Sabha elections due in April-May.

Sharad Pawar said he could not attend the entire virtual meeting as he had some other pre-scheduled engagements *PHOTO: ANI*

Talking to reporters at Junnar in Pune district after attending the meeting, Pawar said, "There was a suggestion made by the bloc members (during the meeting) that Nitish Kumar be appointed as its convenor, but the latter said that a team of party chiefs should be formed and that there is no need to appoint a convenor."

"There is no need to project one face to seek votes. We will select the leader after the elections and we are confident of providing an alternative. In 1977, Morarji Desai was not projected as the prime ministerial face by the opposition," the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president said, adding that it was a positive sign that several parties were coming together.

Pawar said he could not attend the entire virtual meeting as he had some other pre-scheduled

'Virtual alliance doing virtual meet'

BJP President JP Nadda on Saturday took a swipe at the opposition bloc INDIA, saying it is a virtual alliance which is doing virtual meetings as a mere formality and that its leaders' two-point agenda is to save their families and properties. Addressing a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha to launch 'Namo Navmatdata Abhiyan' to connect with first-time voters, he said while Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working for a developed India, empowering the youth, farmers and women, and removing poverty, the opposition stands for "removing Modi". *—PTI*

Uddhav demands Murmu to inaugurate Ram Mandir

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday demanded that the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya be performed by President Droupadi Murmu as it is a matter of "national pride and country's self-respect".

Addressing a press conference here, Thackeray said he will also invite Murmu to the Kalaram temple in Nashik, where he will pay a visit on 22 January, the day of the Ayodhya temple consecration ceremony.

Thackeray had earlier announced that on 22 January, he along with his party leaders and office-bearers will visit the historic Kalaram temple in Nashik and perform 'maha aarti' on the banks of the Godavari river. A day later (on 23 January), the party will also hold a convention of party functionaries in Nashik, where Thackeray will address a rally.

Thackeray said after the Somnath temple in Gujarat was restored, the formal restoration ceremony was held by the country's first president Dr Rajendra Prasad.

"Since this (Ayodhya Ram temple) is a matter of national pride and is related to country's self-respect, the consecration ceremony should be held by President Murmu," Thackeray said.

A delegation representing the Ram Temple Trust on Friday called on President Murmu and formally invited her to attend the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. The delegation comprised Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) working President Alok Kumar, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Ram Lal and Ram temple construction committee chairperson Nripendra Mishra.

Thackeray said Shiv Sainiks, who were part of the 'kar seva' in 1992, will also be felicitated in Nashik. *—PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu receives an invitation for the Ram temple consecration ceremony *PHOTO: ANI*

Ram movement reclaimed secularism: LK

New Delhi, 13 Jan

Veteran BJP leader LK Advani has said that the Ram Janmbhoomi movement, whose primary objective was construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, also became a symbol of "reclaiming the true meaning of secularism from the onslaught of pseudo-secularism". He said a significant debate started during the movement around the difference between genuine secularism and pseudo-secularism. Advani said, the atmosphere in the country has truly become "Ram-maya".

Guests to get Ram temple's soil as 'gift'

LUCKNOW, 13 JAN

All the guests coming to the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple on 22 January will be given 'Ramraj', the soil extracted during the temple's foundation laying, as a 'gift', the Uttar Pradesh government said on Saturday. A member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust said Narendra Modi will be presented with a picture of the Ram temple packed in a jute bag.

Ram Mandir opening will hurt PM: Mani

Kozhikode, 13 Jan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attempt to "conduct the Ram temple consecration ceremony will prove costly given the disapproval of the four shankaracharyas, said Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar. Shankaracharyas have refused to attend the ceremony .He said it is beginning to show who is the "real Hindu" -- one who knows the difference between 'Hinduism' and 'Hindutva'. Uttarakhand's Jyotir Mutt head Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati has said shankaracharyas will attend the event .

No liquor in U'khand on 22 January

Dehradun, 13 Jan

Liquor shops and bars will remain closed in Uttarakhand on January 22 on the occasion of consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.An order to this effect was issued by Excise Commissioner Hari Chandra Semwal on Friday.Liquor licence holders in the state will not be entitled to any compensation or claims on account of this closure, the order said.

Stalin denies report about son's elevation as Deputy CM

CHENNAI, 13 JAN

DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday dismissed as 'rumours,' speculations that his son Udhayanidhi was being made deputy Chief Minister of the state and asserted he was healthy.

Such rumours were being spread by those opposed to the 21 January DMK Youth Wing Conference in Salem, to be held under its chief Udhayanidhi, Stalin said. At a time when youth across the state were getting ready for the Salem conference, those engaged in rumour-mongering "spread false information about my health," he said in a Pongal greetings message.

He said he had attended an event here on Friday where he had mentioned that he had nothing to worry about when the people of the state were happy. "I am healthy and cheerful. I am working, working, working," the 70 year-old leader added.

"After this lie was shattered, rumours were being spread with an intention to create sensation, that deputy CM post (for Udhayanidhi) was going to be given," he added. Udhayanidhi himself had responded to this, saying all ministers were aiding the Chief Minister and put an end to the issue, Stalin said."Party workers should not allow diverting the focus of the Youth Wing Conference, which would be the cry for state rights. The intention of the conference would be to protect state rights and federalism. *—PTI*

Cops says UAPA helped bring down violence in J&K

SRINAGAR, 13 JAN

Strict implementation of the stringent UAPA and attachment of properties of terror sympathisers have acted as a deterrent and helped bring down violence in Jammu and Kashmir, a senior police officer said here Saturday. The officer, who did not wish to be named, also said that a change of heart among the people has brought about a huge improvement in the situation.

"We have launched a multi-pronged crackdown on terror and terror networks. Apart from neutralising terrorists, hundreds of their sympathisers, OGWs, have been arrested. We have started attaching properties of those who support terror voluntarily," he told PTI during an interaction. He said the strict implementation of the rule of law has dealt a big blow to the terror ecosystem.

"Violence has drastically come down after police started to strictly implement the rule of law," the officer added. Over the last couple of years, police have cracked down on overground workers or terror associates in Jammu and Kashmir, booking them under the Unlawful Activities Act. *—PTI*

EAM rules out normalcy with China amid border row

NAGPUR, 13 JAN

Amid a standoff at the border, China should not expect other relations to move on normally, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

Diplomacy continues and sometimes solutions to difficult situations do not come in haste, he said.

He said the borders between India and China are not mutually agreed and it was decided that both sides would not amass troops and would keep the other informed about their movements, but the neighbouring nation violated this agreement in 2020.

It brought its troops in large numbers to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the Galwan incident happened, Jaishankar said.

He said he had explained to his Chinese counterpart that "unless a solution is found at the border, they should not expect other relations to move on normally".

Queried on the recent rift with Maldives (after objectionable comments by some officials of that nation following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lakshwadeep), Jaishankar said, "What we are trying to do, and with a lot of success in the last 10 years, is to build a very strong connect."

Jaishankar said the borders between India and China are not mutually agreed *PHOTO: PTI*

- He said he had explained to his Chinese counterpart that "unless a solution is found at the border, they should not expect other relations to move on normally".

"Politics may go up and down but the people of that nation generally have good feelings towards India and understand the importance of having good relations," he said.

Asked about the United Nations not being able to prevent most wars but some of its members having been successful in denying India a permanent seat in the Security Council, Jaishankar said the UN used to be relevant in the 1950s and 1960s and the five nations in the Security Council used to dominate other countries due to a wide gap between them.

What has happened in the past 30-40 years means it is no longer the case, Jaishankar said, adding the limitations of the UN are now visible and many people believe India, one of the largest economies in the world, must be there (in the Security Council as a permanent member). *—PTI*

Sprouting desire in BRS to revert to old name

HYDERABAD, 13 JAN

After being trounced in the recent state assembly polls, there is a growing demand from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi leaders and cadre to the high command to change its name to Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS). According to party sources, several party workers voiced their suggestion to BRS Working President and son of the former chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, KT Rama Rao saying removal of "Telangana" from the name has ostensibly created a disconnect with the state.

Senior BRS leaders, including Rama Rao are currently holding a series of Lok Sabha constituency-wise preparatory meetings starting from 3 January eliciting suggestions from the cadres while brainstorming the reasons for the poll debacle.

"In every party meeting some leaders and cadres are asking the senior leadership to change the name to TRS. They feel that without Telangana, the party name appears to have caused a disconnect with people," a senior leader of BRS told PTI.

Another leader said though they are averse to the name change, they could not voice their mind as Rao, also known as KCR is known for taking tough decisions and emerging indomitable.

The name change to TRS is one of the top five reasons being attributed for the party's defeat in the assembly polls, the leader added.*—PTI*

CPI(M) troubled over Veena's firm probe

T'PURAM, 13 JAN

A Central probe ordered against an IT company owned by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter T Veena has put the ruling CPI(M) in a fix in the state as the party is gearing up for the campaign ahead of Lok Sabha polls.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs had ordered an investigation into the complaints about financial transactions between a private minerals company and Veena's IT firm, which had triggered a huge political controversy in the southern state recently.

Officials confirmed that a joint director at the Office of the Director General of Corporate Affairs had ordered the probe. The office comes under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The Joint Director Md Shakeel did not respond to messages and calls.

As the news came out on Saturday, Opposition Congress immediately reacted, seeking an explanation from the state leadership of the Marxist party on the matter. However, CPI (M) state secretariat, which had issued a press statement months ago defending the financial transactions between the minerals company and Veena's IT firm, is yet to react to the Centre's probe. While LDF convenor EP Jayarajan said he was unaware of the development, ministers P Rajeev and PA Mohammed Riyas did not give a clear reply while reporters sought their reaction. "There is nothing new in these allegations. Everything had been raised before. Let's see what will happen," PWD Minister and Veena's husband Riyas told reporters here.

The development comes at a time when the Left party is planning several campaign programmes for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. *—PTI*

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan *PHOTO: PTI*

- Officials confirmed that a joint director at the Office of the Director General of Corporate Affairs had ordered the probe. The office comes under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The Joint Director Md Shakeel did not respond to messages and calls.

AHEAD OF YATRA

Cong to highlight 'anyay kaal' of Modi's 10 years

IMPHAL, JAN 13 (PTI)

A day before the start of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur, the Congress on Saturday said it was an ideological yatra and not an electoral one, and asserted that it was being taken out against the "anyay kaal" of 10 years of the Narendra Modi government.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the biggest challenge before the country is that it is facing an ideology which believes in polarisation, economic inequalities and political authoritarianism.

Jairam Ramesh said the biggest challenge before the country is that it is facing an ideology which believes in polarisation *PHOTO: PTI*

"The prime minister shows golden dreams of 'amrit kaal' but what is the reality of the last 10 years — 'anyay kaal'. No mention of 'anyay kaal' is made while big boasts of 'amrit kaal' are projected," Ramesh said addressing a press conference here along with former Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh, state party Chief Keisham Meghachandra Singh and Congress Working Committee member Gaikhangam.

"The yatra is being taken out keeping in mind political, economic and social injustices committed in the last 10 years," Ramesh said.

"This is a yatra by a political party. It is an ideological yatra and not an electoral one," Ramesh stressed.

The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will pass through 100 Lok Sabha constituencies in 15 states and the party believes it will prove to be as "transformative" as Rahul Gandhi's earlier cross-country march.

The Congress has said that it is taking out the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as the government did not give it a chance to raise people's issues in Parliament and the initiative is aimed at re-establishing the principles of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity enshrined in the Constitution. *—PTI*

Telangana CM to join Rahul's Nyay Yatra in Manipur

Hyderabad,13 Jan

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, who is currently in the national capital, is expected to join Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that will be flagged off in Manipur on 14 January.

According to official sources, Reddy may meet AICC leader Sonia Gandhi in Delhi today.

On Sunday morning, Revanth Reddy will leave for Manipur. After participating in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on its first day, he will return to Delhi and depart for Davos to attend the World Economic Forum summit, sources said.

Reddy is also likely to discuss the issue of nominations for two MLC seats that fell vacant after the resignation of BRS MLAs Kadiyam Srihari and Kaushik Reddy following their election to legislative assembly last month.

The Chief Minister will be accompanied by IT and Industries minister D Sridhar Babu and senior officials will be meeting several industry leaders and pitch Telangana as an ideal investment destination. *—PTI*

Prabha Atre PHOTO: PTI

Classical singer Prabha Atre dies at 92

PUNE, 13 JAN

Renowned classical singer and Padma Vibhushan recipient Dr Prabha Atre passed away following a cardiac arrest at her residence here at the age of 92 early on Saturday, sources close to her said.Atre, a torch-bearer of the Kirana Gharana of Hindustani classical music, had been honoured with all three Padma awards by the Indian government."Atre suffered a cardiac arrest during her sleep at her residence. She was rushed to Dinanath Mangeshkar Hospital, where she was declared dead at 5.30 am," a source said.Since some of the close family members of Atre live abroad, her funeral will be performed once they arrive, the source said. —*PTI*

Delhi records coldest morning this winter

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Delhi on Saturday recorded its lowest minimum temperature of the season at 3.6 degrees Celsius and thick fog blanketed several parts of the city, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.
On Friday, the national capital had recorded a minimum temperature of 3.9 degrees Celsius, the lowest in five years. The maximum temperature on Saturday is likely to settle around 19 degrees Celsius, the IMD said. The visibility at Safdarjung Observatory, Delhi's main weather station, was 200 metres at 5:30 am, it said. According to the Railways, 18 Delhi-bound trains were delayed by one to six hours due to the fog. According to the IMD, very dense fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres, between 51 and 200 metres is dense, between 201 and 500 metres moderate, and between 501 and 1,000 metres shallow. —*PTI*

Several tribals ostracised over festival celebration

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Several tribal families in Dumaria block of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district were allegedly ostracised by the village head for not celebrating a festival in the manner that he wanted, officials said.Almost a dozen families of Chota Asthi had approached Deputy Commissioner Manjunath Bhajantri on Friday, apprising him of the matter, they said.The tribals claimed they had celebrated the 'Sohrai' festival in October last year, following which Gram Pradhan Rupai Hansda issued a diktat, allegedly barring them from availing benefits under various government schemes."We did not celebrate the festival how he wanted... After that, even our children were not allowed to attend school or visit the nearby playground," one of them told reporters.Asked about the incident, Bhajantri told PTI: "I have instructed the block development officer (BDO) and the local police to convene a meeting with the gram pradhan, the aggrieved families and other stakeholders in order to settle the matter." —*PTI*

Actor Radhika, passengers stay locked on aero brigde

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Actor Radhika Apte on Saturday claimed she and other passengers at an airport were locked in the aerobridge for hours after her flight was delayed.The actor, known for movies "Badlapur", "Andhadhun", "Pad Man" and "Lust Stories", shared her ordeal on Instagram, without naming the city, airport and airline."I had to post this! Today morning I had an flight at 8.30. It's 10.50 now and the flight has still not boarded. But the flight said we were boarding and put all the passengers in the aerobridge and LOCKED IT," Apte said.She also posted a video, of passengers seen behind locked glass. —*PTI*

Monks assaulted in WB, leads to political row

Police said incident took place due to misunderstanding

PURULIA/KOLKATA, 13 JAN

A purported video of three monks being attacked by a mob in West Bengal's Purulia over suspicion that they were "kidnappers in disguise" has triggered a political row, with opposition BJP alleging collapse of law and order in the state.

The TMC, meanwhile, accused the BJP of trying to give a communal twist to the incident.

In the video, the authenticity of which PTI could not independently verify, the monks, who were on their way to the Gangasagar Mela, could be seen getting roughed up by a group of people in Kashipur.

The Purulia Police, in a post on X, said the incident took place due to a misunderstanding.

"Facts are being misrepresented from certain quarters about a recent incident in Purulia. The fact is, on 11.01.24 afternoon, there was a misunderstanding between three Gangasagar-bound sadhus with three local minor girls near Kashipur over a language problem.

"The girls got scared, and local people manhandled the sadhus, damaging their vehicle and alleging a kidnapping attempt. Local police promptly intervened and rescued the sadhus," it said.

12 people have been arrested in this regard based on a specific case, police said."All possible assistance was rendered to the sadhus. There is no communal overtone whatsoever regarding the incident. Anyone trying to fuel communal passions will be strictly dealt with as per law," it added.The post by Purulia Police was also circulated by the TMC media cell.

Reacting to the incident, Union Minister Anurag Thakur, who was in the city to attend a programme, remarked on the "politics of appeasement" in West Bengal."The state government is not doing anything... Where is the appeasement politics taking West Bengal? Why is this anti-Hindu thought process being created?" he said.The Union Information and Broadcasting Minister also alleged that law and order in the state has collapsed under Mamata Banerjee's rule. —*PTI*

A screengrab from the assault video that was shared by Amit Malviya on X PHOTO: X

Flight diverted due to bad weather finally lands

GUWAHATI/MUMBAI, 13 JAN

A Guwahati-bound IndiGo flight from Mumbai, which was diverted to Dhaka in Bangladesh due to bad weather, landed at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here on Saturday, officials said.

The flight, scheduled to arrive here on Friday night, landed at 11.10 am, they said.

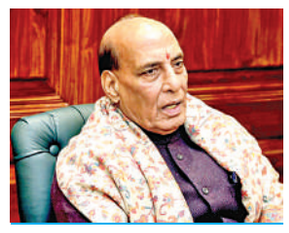
It had departed from Dhaka at 10.54 am (Bangladesh time).

The IndiGo flight 5319 had to be diverted to Dhaka due to bad weather in Guwahati and "initially Kolkata and Bhubaneswar were considered for landing", an airline spokesperson said.

"It was not possible to land in Kolkata due to bad weather, while in Bhubaneswar there was runway closure and the flight had to be diverted to Dhaka," she said.

An alternate set of crew was arranged to operate the flight from Dhaka to Guwahati, she said. —*PTI*

BRO's paid labourers to get term life insurance



Rajanth Singh PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal to roll out a term insurance scheme for casual paid labourers engaged by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) for various infrastructure projects.

Under the scheme, a sum of Rs 10 lakh will be given to the next of kin in case of death of a labourer during project works, according to the defence ministry.

"Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal to launch a group (term) insurance scheme for Casual Paid Labourers (CPLs) engaged by Border Roads Organisation/ General Reserve Engineer Force for the ongoing project works," it said in a statement on Saturday.

"This scheme will provide the insured value of Rs 10 lakh as an insurance in any kind of death to CPLs family/next of kin," it said.

The ministry said the scheme will serve as a social security and welfare measure to the CPLs working in remote and far-flung areas of the nation."Keeping in view the severe risk posed to the lives of CPLs posted in hazardous worksites, inclement weather, inhospitable terrain and occupational health hazards, and considering the deaths occurred/reported during their engagement, the provision of insurance coverage on humanitarian grounds will prove to be a great morale booster to the CPLs," it added.The ministry said the scheme will go a "long way" in securing the livelihoods of the families of the CLPs. —*PTI*

Mahadev Betting app case: ED nabs 2 more

RAIPUR, 13 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested two more people in connection with its money laundering investigation into the Mahadev online betting and gaming app case, officials said on Saturday.

Nitin Tibrewal, a resident of Kolkata, and Raipur-based Amit Agrawal were taken into custody under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and produced before a special court in Raipur on Friday, ED lawyer Saurabh Pandey said.

The court sent them to ED custody till 17 January, he said.

Tibrewal is alleged to be a "close associate" of an accused in the case, Vikash Chapparia.

He is alleged to have purchased some "undisclosed" properties in Dubai and a majority shareholder in an FPI company in which Chapparia is also a shareholder, ED sources said.

The agency suspects these assets were bought using the "proceeds of crime" generated from the profits of Mahadev app.

Amit Agrawal, the sources said, is a relative of another accused in the case, Anil Kumar Agrawal.

Amit Agrawal is alleged to have received Mahadev app funds from Anil Kumar Agrawal and his (Amit Agrawal's) wife is said to have purchased many properties along with Anil Dammani, another accused in the case.

Two Dubai-based immovable assets, a flat and a plot, worth Rs 99.46 crore belonging to Chhapparia and Anil Agrawal were attached by the ED last year. —*PTI*

Cops question CEO's husband in son's murder

PANAJI, 13 JAN

The estranged husband of Suchana Seth, the AI start up CEO accused of killing her four-year-old child, on Saturday appeared before Calangute police in Goa as part of the probe, an official said.Seth allegedly smothered her son to death in a service apartment in Candolim in north Goa, packed his corpse in a bag and hailed a taxi to go back to Bengaluru but was arrested mid-way on 8 January in Chitradurga in Karnataka, as per police."Venkat Raman, the accused's husband, arrived here from Bengaluru in the afternoon and reached Calangute police station. We will be recording his statement in the case as part of the probe," the official said.Raman was in Jakarta in Indonesia when the murder took place.According to police, the woman smothered her son to death before trying to commit suicide. —*PTI*

Academics should not be compromised: JNU VC

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

JNU Vice Chancellor Santishree D Pandit advised students not to compromise studies for politics amid a row over the varsity imposing a series of stringent measures against staging dharnas within its campus.

Pandit said disciplinary action can adversely impact students' future prospects for securing jobs.

"Nobody's saying don't do protests but at the same time your academics should not be compromised. Many of these students who engage in politics later come to me seeking extensions which will reflect in their profile when they go for a job," she told PTI in an interview.The vice chancellor cited the open debates and lectures on the Israel-Hamas conflict in JNU – stressing that no agitation has taken place over it – as an example of which showed the culture of critical thinking on campus.Pandit, who assumed charge as the Vice Chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2022, said she withdrew all proctorial inquiries against students in the 2019 fee hike protest considering its impact on their careers.The vice chancellor said the students should express their freedoms with responsibility. The administration has officially notified the chief proctor office (CPO) manual penalising certain actions on campus such as obstructing officials from performing their duty, drinking alcohol or overspeeding on campus to she said. —*PTI*

Body of ex-model Divya Pahuja recovered from canal

CHANDIGARH,13 JAN

Days after she was shot dead in a Gurugram hotel, the body of former model Divya Pahuja was recovered from a canal in Haryana's Fatehabad district on Saturday, according to police.

The body was recovered based on information provided by accused Balraj Gill, who had disposed of the body and was arrested from the Kolkata airport on Thursday, police officials said.

Pahuja was taken to Hotel City Point by five people and shot in the head inside room number 111 because she had allegedly been extorting money from the hotel owner, Abhijeet Singh,56, by blackmailing him with his "obscene pictures", police had said earlier.

Divya Pahuja PHOTO: PTI

Gurugram Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime) Varun Kumar Dahiya said Pahuja's body was recovered from the subsidiary canal of the Bhakra canal in Fatehabad's Tohana.

It will be sent for post-mortem examination, he said.

CCTV footage from Hotel City Point showed the accused, including Singh, purportedly dragging Pahuja's body wrapped in a white sheet through the lobby. They later fled the hotel in a car with the body in the boot.According to police, Singh handed over the car with the body to Balraj Gil ,28, around a kilometre from the hotel. The car was later found abandoned at a bus stand in Punjab's Patiala. —*PTI*

Fire in high rise in Dombivali, no report of injuries

THANE, 13 JAN

A fire broke out in the duct of a high rise in Dombivali in Thane district on Saturday, though no one was injured in the incident, a civic official said.The blaze in the 18-storey building with 108 flats in Khoni village started at 1:30pm and was doused an hour later after two fire engines were deployed, Thane Municipal Corporation regional disaster management cell Chief Yasin Tadvi told PTI."The fire started in the duct and spread from the ground floor to the top floor. Plastic fitments were gutted. No one was injured in the incident. —*PTI*

Disrespectful: Hansal Mehta on Omar's criticism

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Director Hansal Mehta has responded to National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah's criticism of filming of a show in the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly complex, saying that such an "unwelcoming attitude" is the reason why India is considered an "unfriendly shooting location".Abdullah, the former chief minister of the erstwhile state of J&K, had on Friday criticised the Jammu and Kashmir administration for allowing shooting of Huma Qureshi-starrer "Maharani" inside assembly complex and called it an "absolute shame".Mehta, the maker of critically-acclaimed series like "Scam 1992" and "Scoop", replied to Abdullah's post on X, calling it "disrespectful" and "regressive"."Why is it a shame? How is filming of a drama demeaning democracy or the 'mother of democracy'? Every body on a film set including actors, background actorsare all citizens of this country and have every right to work with dignity and deserve respect and understanding- at least from somebody as educated as yourself," the filmmaker said.In countries around the world, filmmakers and actors are allowed to use public places, government buildings and council halls for shooting, Mehta added."It is because of this unwelcoming attitude that India is considered an unfriendly shooting location and we often prefer shooting abroad. I have respect for you but this feels very disrespectful, and myopic," the filmmaker said. —*PTI*

WINTER CELEBRATIONS

People celebrate Lohri in Jammu on Saturday. It is a winter harvest festival celebrated in northern states of India —PTI PHOTO

India logs 1,200 cases of JN.1 so far, says INSACOG

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

A total of 1,200 cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been reported in the country so far with Nagaland becoming the latest of the 17 states and Union territories to have detected its presence, according to INSACOG on Saturday.

Data compiled by the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) showed Karnataka has reported the highest number of JN.1 cases at 215, followed by Andhra Pradesh (189), Maharashtra (170), Kerala (154), West Bengal (96), Goa (90), Tamil Nadu (88) and Gujarat (76).Telangana and Rajasthan have recorded 32 JN.1 cases each,Chhattisgarh has recorded 25.—*PTI*

NATURE'S WONDERS

Mizo varsity researchers discover new snake species

AIZAWL, 13 JAN

Researchers from Mizoram University's zoology department have discovered a new species of coral snake in the state.

It has been named Sinomicrurus gorei after British India doctor Gore, according to HT Lalremsanga, a zoology Professor at Mizoram University.

Lalremsanga, along with his research scholar Lalbiakzuala and other researchers from outside the state discovered the new species of coral snake.

The reptile is locally known as 'Rulṭhihna' due to its striking resemblance to a Mizo traditional amber necklace called 'ṭhihna', Lalremsanga said.

According to Lalremsanga, a total of nine species of Sinomicrurus coral snakes have been discovered worldwide PHOTO: PIXABAY

The researchers made this discovery while studying the skeletal and DNA (nuclear and mitochondrial gene 5) of coral snakes in Mizoram.

The new species was unveiled in a study titled 'Reappraisal of the systematics of two sympatric coral snakes (Reptilia: Elapidae)', which was published in the British science journal, Systematics & Biodiversity (Taylor & Francis Group) on 10 January.According to Lalremsanga, a total of nine species of Sinomicrurus coral snakes have been discovered worldwide, and out of these, only one species called Sinomicrurus macclellandi is found in Northeast India.He mentioned that until this research, Sinomicrurus gorei was considered the same species as Sinomicrurus macclellandi due to their close resemblance.

"Since 2008, I have suspected that Sinomicrurus gorei is a different species. However, other researchers did not agree with me, possibly because they failed to study the data and various parameters," Lalremsanga said.However, a recent study showed that Sinomicrurus gorei is indeed a different species, with unique patterns and different scales, hemipenis, DNA, and skull (based on CT-Scan), he said.

The new study also revealed that while Sinomicrurus macclellandi can lay six to 14 eggs at a time, Sinomicrurus gorei lays up to three eggs, he said. —*PTI*

Govt yet to decide on roll-out of HPV jabs

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The Union Health Ministry on Saturday said it is yet to take a decision on the roll-out of HPV vaccination against cervical cancer in the country. Dismissing media reports on the vaccination campaign, the ministry said it is closely monitoring cervical cancer cases in the country and is in regular touch with states and various health departments.It said media reports speculating that the government will launch a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign in the second quarter of 2024 to target girls in the 9-14 age group are "not true".In June 2022, the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) recommended the introduction of HPV vaccine in the universal immunization programme with "a one-time catch-up" for adolescent girls in the 9-14 age group followed with routine introduction at nine years, the government told the Rajya Sabha in March. The NTAGI recommendation was based on fresh evidence on disease burden, evidence on effectiveness of single dose of HPV vaccine, clinical trial data. —*PTI*

'DRAGON'S TEETH'

Ukrainian servicemen check newly built anti tank fortifications, named 'dragon's teeth' and razor wire, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near Russian border in Chernihiv region, Ukraine
PHOTO: REUTERS

This is a disaster bigger than all of us: Gaza Doctor

Dr. Suhaib Alhamss, the director of the Kuwaiti Hospital in Gaza's southern town of Rafah, gets ready to perform surgery during his work day on
PHOTO: AP

For a few hours every day or night, Dr. Suhaib Alhamss tries to sleep on a thin mattress in an operating room. He swings in and out of half-consciousness, both too tired to open his eyes and too tense to let go. Thunderous shellfire often rattles the windows of the hospital he directs in the southern Gaza Strip.

But the worst sounds, Alhamss said, come from inside Kuwaiti Hospital: the cries of tiny children with no parents and enormous wounds. The panicked screams of patients jolted awake to the realisation that they've lost a limb.

The Israel-Hamas war, which started 100 days ago Sunday, has exposed him, his staff and the people of Gaza to a scale of violence and horror unlike anything they had seen before. It has rendered his hometown unrecognisable.

"This is a disaster that's bigger than all of us," Alhamss, 35, said by phone between surgeries.

His hospital, donated and funded by Kuwait's government, is one of two in the city of Rafah. With just four intensive care beds before the war, it now receives some 1,500 wounded patients each day and at least 50 people dead on arrival — adults and children with shrapnel-shattered limbs and pulped bodies, bone-exposing wounds and tattered flesh.

Over 23,400 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed in the war, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The count does not distinguish between civilians and militants.

Israel, which mounted its blistering air and ground campaign in response to Hamas' 7 October attack on southern Israel that saw 1,200 people killed and 250 others abducted, holds the group responsible for civilian deaths by embedding militants in buildings used by non-combatants.

To make room for the daily rush of war-wounded, Alhamss has crammed a few dozen extra beds into the intensive care unit. He cleared out the pharmacy, which was largely empty anyway since Israel's siege has deprived the hospital of IV lines and most medicines. Still, patients sprawl on the floors.

"The situation is completely out of control," he said.

A urologist by training and a father of three, Alhamss has watched aghast as his city and hospital have transformed over the course of the war.

With its low-rise concrete buildings and trash-strewn alleys teeming with unemployed men, Rafah, the strip's southernmost city, long has been a squalid place straddling the Egyptian frontier. Notorious as a smuggling capital during the Israeli-Egyptian blockade, it contains Gaza's only border crossing that doesn't lead into Israel.

Now it's the flashpoint in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Apartment towers have been blasted into flat, smoldering ruins. Israel's evacuation orders and expanding offensive have swelled Rafah's population from 280,000 to 1.4 million, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians jammed into flimsy tents smothering the streets.

Most people spend hours each day in search of food, waiting in motionless lines outside aid distribution centers and sometimes plodding kilometers (miles) on foot to carry back canned beans and rice.

The faces he sees around the city have changed, too, as Israel presses on with its goal of destroying Hamas. Fear and strain crease the features of his colleagues, Alhamss says. Blood and dust smear the faces of the incoming wounded, while waxy gray skin and eyes circled by darkening rings are marks of the dying.

"You can see the exhaustion, the nervousness, the hunger on everyone's faces," Alhamss said. "It's a strange place now. It's not the city I know."

Aid trucks have trickled through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. But it's nowhere near enough to meet the besieged enclave's surging needs, humanitarian officials say. In the absence of vital equipment, medical staff have applied their ingenuity to new ends. Alhamss dresses patients' wounds with burial shrouds.

"Each day I have people who die before my eyes because I don't have medicine or burn ointment or supplies to help them," he said.

He is too overwhelmed to dwell on all that he's seen, but some images spring up unbidden: the vacuous stare of a young boy who survived a strike that killed his entire family, a newborn rescued from his dead mother's womb.

"I think, how will they go on? They have no one left in this world," Alhamss said. His thoughts turn to his own children — 12-year-old Jenna, eight-year-old Hala and seven-year-old Hudhayfa — sheltering at their grandmother's Rafah apartment. He sees them once a week, on Thursdays, when they come to the hospital to give him a hug. *—AP*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Improved health care cuts maternal mortality

Pregnancy means new life to most of us — and a unique experience every time, bringing your baby into this world. But in all too many cases, pregnancy also means the end of a life.

In late February 2023, the United Nations released a new report on maternal mortality around the world. The report described how one woman dies every two minutes due to child birthor complications experienced in pregnancy.

"Pregnancy is tragically still a shockingly dangerous experience for millions around the world," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the year 2000, the global maternal mortality rate (MMR) stood at 339. That means that 339 pregnant people of child-bearing age died per 100,000 live births.

In 2020, the global MMR was 223.

But according to the UN report, most countries around the globe have failed to lower their maternal mortality rate (MMR) significantly in that 20-year period.

The UN report says there had been a small decrease between the years 2000 and 2015, but that since 2016 the global maternal mortality rate has stagnated. And that is unacceptable, said Jenny Cresswell, a scientist at the WHO and co-author of the report.

"Stagnation is absolutely not good enough," Cresswell told DW. "The Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] target is to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. We are currently far off-track to meet this target."

- In the year 2000, the global maternal mortality rate (MMR) stood at 339. In 2020, the global MMR was 223

India: On the way to a success story

The UN report says South Asia is one of the few world regions where the maternal mortality rate is decreasing. And India has seen the biggest improvement in its MMR.

Maternal mortality fell in India by more than 73 per cent between the years 2000 and 2020.

In 2020, India's MMR was at 103 nationwide. That is still a lot higher than the MMR in the US. But while maternal mortality in the US increased at an annual rate of 2.88 per cent from 2000 to 2020, it fell at an annual rate of 6.64 per cent in India during the same time period.

Rajib Dasgupta, a professor at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said India had started to see the benefits of a more liberalized and growing economy in the past two decades.

"There has been an overall decline in absolute poverty, a sustained increase in key determinants such as women's education and income, and a growing infrastructure," said Dasgupta.

These social factors all contribute significantly to improving maternal health and preventing deaths during and after pregnancy, according to the UN report.

Countries in South Asia that have seen their MMR decrease over the past 20 years "have made good progress in terms of economic development, increasing female education and other important areas that all play a role," Cresswell told DW. "They have demonstrated sustained political commitment to increasing women's access to quality maternity services."

Tackling the disparity between Indian states

But the experts say India needs more political commitment to spread these improvements across the country.

"To make it to the SDG target [a maternal mortality rate below 70], the inequity between the Indian states should receive more attention," Dasgupta said.

A number of Indian states have achieved the SDG target.

At 19, the state of Kerala does not only have the lowest rate in India, but also a lower MMR than the United States, for example.

At the other end of the spectrum is the state of Assam, with a maternal mortality rate of 195, more than 10 times higher than Kerala's MMR.

But even in Assam things are moving in the right direction. Down to Earth, an Indian magazine on environmental and development policy, reported at the end of 2022 that Assam's MMR was 237 between 2014 and 2016. That shows a drop of more than 40 deaths in pregnancy per 100,000 live births.

India is on the right path, said Dasgupta — it has invested in medical infrastructure and increased the number of medical personnel across the country and now "it is the time to build upon this strength."

—Courtesy, DW News

The UN report says South Asia is one of the few world regions where the maternal mortality rate is decreasing. And India has seen the biggest improvement in its MMR
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Maestro Rashid Khan's death robs India of a fine vocalist

The death of Indian music maestro Rashid Khan earlier this week was followed by an outpouring of grief on and off social media.

The 55-year-old singer died in a hospital in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) on Tuesday after a prolonged battle with cancer. He was buried with state honours two days later.

Sporting a mop of tousled salt-pepper hair and often dressed in bright floral shirts and kurtas, Rashid Khan didn't exactly carry the air of a traditional musical ustaad (maestro).

But he was, undisputedly, the defining artist of his generation, someone who enjoyed a kind of commercial success and public adulation that was rare for a classical singer of his era.

He commanded the biggest fee among his contemporaries and performed in packed auditoriums: in his busiest years, he was doing 20 concerts a month.

His untimely death has robbed India of one of its finest and most popular vocalists. The appeal of his khayal - a major form of north Indian classical music - cut across musical hierarchies, becoming a rare converging point for common people and the pundits.

Born in Badayun town of Uttar Pradesh state to a lineage of heredity music practitioners of the Rampur Sahaswan Gharana (musical lineage), Rashid was self-admittedly not very interested in music until his late teens.

His guru and maternal grand-uncle, Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan, was an exacting teacher and would make him repeat a single note pattern all day long. Hours of practice and the repetitive rigour that went into honing this difficult art form didn't sit well with his rebellious, fun-loving personality.

It was only when young Rashid was brought into the hallowed grounds of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, an exclusive music conservatory in Kolkata, that he really began enjoying his training, absorbing ideas and influences from the stalwarts who lived there.

Gifted with a melodious voice, it didn't take him very long to win plaudits. After the death of his guru in the 1990s, there was a void in performers who sang the Rampur style and Rashid swiftly filled it,

The 55-year-old singer Rashid Khan died in a hospital in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) on Tuesday after a prolonged battle with cancer
PHOTO: X

storming the concert scene with flattering endorsements of his talent from the likes of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi. The great maestro once said the future of north Indian classical music rested safely in Rashid's singing.

"But even after gaining mainstream success, Rashid continued to live life on his own terms, without a care for the world," said renowned sitar player Ustad Shujaat Hussain Khan. He was a man who "mainly spoke in grunts, sighs and nods", a musician who did not realise his genius, and a performer who "just got up and started singing".

"But when he sang, you realised the greatness of his talent."

While trained within the confines of Rampur style - which focused on intricate rhythmic play, fast elaborations and a full-throated throw of voice - Rashid, like most greats, transcended its boundaries. Slow tempo melodic elaborations that had a strong emotive emphasis became the insignia of his performances.

"He refused to be boxed in or be bound by convention," Shailaja Khanna, his old friend and music critic, told the BBC.

According to Shubha Mudgal, a noted vocalist, Rashid borrowed generously from the different styles of pathbreaking musicians such as Ustaad Amir Khan and Ustaad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, "but chose not to imitate them".

"It was his unorthodox approach to music that led him to finding his own voice," Mudgal added. That, along with "an irrepressible urge to be himself artistically", is what created some of the magic.

In his 2004 book, Khayal Vocalism, noted music expert Deepak Raja called him the "prince of modernism" who showed complete respect to classical forms but didn't hesitate to "blur the distinctions between mainstream genres".

Which perhaps explains why Rashid became a prolific collaborator, and added different styles of singing to his performing repertoire. He didn't believe in the hierarchies imposed by puritans. And it was this willingness to lend his voice to a variety of semi-classical forms "that led to his gaining a mammoth audience", says Mudgal.For listeners, it was Rashid's ability to stir profound exclamations - of love, devotion and reverence - that set him apart. Hearing him sing was a beautiful surprise, as he would switch between the lyrical and soft, before suddenly bursting into an intricate taan - the technique of improvising with rapid melodic passages.

The lover's lament "Yaad piya ki aaye" - once immortalised by Ustaad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan - was one of the most requested pieces of music in a Rashid concert. And he was also open to including his Bollywood hits like "Aoge jab tum o saajna" in a classical performance.

The puritans didn't approve of this. Critics also complained that Rashid didn't really explore the rare ragas of the Hindustani classical repertory, and could at times, sound mechanical in his performances as he was constantly juggling multiple concerts."

But he managed to satisfy the demanding, orthodox listeners as well as those who came to listen to the singer they had heard in a film," says Mudgal.

He also captivated the masses by creating a "regal ambiance" to his concerts, says Khanna. A big presence on stage, he was always surrounded by fellow musicians accompanying him on instruments like the harmonium and the three-stringed sarangi, and a jamboree of vocalists providing the drone of the tanpura. It immediately transported people into another realm.As a fan put it, at a Rashid concert, one could feel the audience singing along in their heads, or rather wishing they could.His contemporary, singer Ashwini Bhide Deshpande remembers being completely entranced by one of his performances in the early 2000s."His exquisite exposition of Raag (melody) Jog - a night melody - didn't leave me for three days.

His music elevated people's spirits, and soothed their souls There are many who play to the gallery by displaying histrionics. But Rashid's singing had an emotional depth that is hard to find," said Bhide."It's a huge loss to the music world," she adds. "

He now joins the pantheon of greats from a bygone era, who were endowed with that rare gift to bring a raga (melody) alive." *—BBC News*

PHOTO: REUTERS

Suella Braverman hits out at UK PM's Rwanda bill

LONDON, 13 JAN

Suella Braverman, sacked as UK Home Secretary last year, has hit out at her former boss to say Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Safety of Rwanda Bill coming up in Parliament next week won't work. After stern statements in the House of Commons during the week, the Indian-origin former minister said in an interview with GB News' channel on Friday that she will not support the bill in its current form. The controversial bill, now going through its parliamentary process after clearing a first hurdle in the Commons last month, seeks to overcome legal hurdles in the way of deporting asylum seekers to the east African nation as a key strategy to meet Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" of illegal migrants landing on England's shores. "I am only going to support a bill that works," Braverman said in the| interview. *—PTI*

Russia attacks Ukraine with 40 missiles, drones

KYIV, 13 JAN

Russia launched dozens of attacks over Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian air force said Saturday, as Kyiv pushes for more air defence. "A total of 40 means of enemy air attack were recorded," the air force said, adding it destroyed eight missiles. Ukraine's air force said Russia attacked with a wide range of weapons including cruise, ballistic, and anti-aircraft missiles as well as drones. "More than 20 devices" failed to reach their targets due to "active measures by means of electronic warfare," it added. Spokesperson Yuri Ignat later clarified. "Either they fell in the fields, they were detonated in the air, or they were affected by means of radio-electronic warfare of our defence forces," he said on television. Authorities have not yet reported any fatalities. *—AFP*

Blizzard strikes US Midwest, cancelling flights

LOWA, 13 JAN

Plunging temperatures, whipping wind and buckets of snow derailed the final stretch of caucus campaigning in the US state of Iowa Friday as Republican presidential hopefuls delivered their last pitches to voters. Forecasters warned of "fairly intense blizzard conditions" throughout much of the Midwestern state, as the National Weather Service (NWS) said gusts of 50 to 55 miles (80 to 89 kilometers) per hour, paired with blowing snow, could reduce visibility down to a quarter of a mile. The extreme weather was making life difficult for White House hopefuls Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley, who both canceled events just days before Monday's caucus in Iowa -- the first vote of the 2024 White House race. "We want everyone to be safe," DeSantis told reporters in the state capital Des Moines. The wind was howling very strongly in the city, where the temperature had fallen to 7 degrees Fahrenheit. *—AFP*

2 US navy sailors missing off coast of Somalia

WASHINGTON, 13 JAN

Two US Navy sailors were reported missing at sea while conducting operations off the coast of Somalia on Thursday evening, the US military said in a statement on Friday, adding that search and rescue operations were ongoing to locate them. "The sailors were forward-deployed to the US 5th Fleet (C5F) area of operations supporting a wide variety of missions," the U. Central Command said. The statement added that additional information would not be made available until the personnel recovery operation was complete. *—Reuters*

US begins new strike on Houthi target in Yemen

US described the attack as a 'follow-on action'

WASHINGTON, 13 JAN

The United States launched new strikes against the Houthi rebels in Yemen for a second straight day after the Iran-aligned group warned it would retaliate for a series of attacks on its facilities. The US military's Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Saturday that Tomahawk missiles were fired from the US Navy's USS Carney at a Houthi radar site.

It described the attack as a "follow-on action" after the US and the United Kingdom launched a barrage of attacks by land and sea targeting Houthi military sites across Yemen to stop the group from attacking merchant and military vessels in the Red Sea.

"I heard these explosions and many people talked on social media that they had heard powerful explosions in the capital, Sanaa," said Al Jazeera's Mohammed al-Attab, reporting from Yemen's capital. Nasreddin Amer, the Houthis' deputy information secretary, told Al Jazeera the overnight US strike caused no damage or casualties. "There were no injuries, no material nor human losses," Amer said, adding that the Houthis would come back with a "strong and effective response". Meanwhile, Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam told Reuters news agency the US attack would not deter it from waging attacks on Israel-linked vessels. US President Joe Biden warned on Friday that he could order more strikes. "We will make sure that we respond to the Houthis if they continue this outrageous behaviour." The Houthis say their campaign is part of their support for Palestinians under siege and bombardment by Israeli forces in Gaza over the past three months.

The US Department of Defense said that its first night of attacks on Yemen late on Thursday involved more than 150 munitions fired from US and UK "maritime and air platforms" that targeted more than 16 locations controlled by Houthi forces.

The sites attacked included Houthi weapons depots, launch sites, air defence radars, "command and control nodes", and "production facilities", the department said. The Houthis, who have controlled most of Yemen for nearly a decade, said five fighters were killed. They promised to continue their attacks on regional shipping.

The US says the Houthis have carried out 27 attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea since commandeering the Galaxy Leader and its 25-strong multinational crew on 19 November. The strikes are the first on Yemeni territory since 2016 and also marked the first military intervention by the US in reaction to drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since Israel's war on Gaza started on 7 October.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

Newly recruited fighters raise their firearms during a ceremony at the end of their training in Sanaa, Yemen **PHOTO: REUTERS**

100TH DAY

Israel-Hamas war has transformed the region

JERUSALEM, 13 JAN

Sunday marks 100 days that Israel and Hamas have been at war.

The war already is the longest and deadliest between Israel and the Palestinians since Israel's establishment in 1948, and the fighting shows no signs of ending. Israel declared war in response to Hamas' unprecedented cross-border attack on 7 October in which the Islamic militant group killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 others hostage. It was the deadliest attack in Israel's history and the deadliest for Jews since the Holocaust.

Israel responded with weeks of intense airstrikes in Gaza before expanding the operation into a ground offensive. It says its goal is to crush Hamas and win the release of the more than 100 hostages still held by the group.

Israel will never be the same

The 7 October attack blindsided Israel and shattered the nation's faith in its leaders.

While the public has rallied behind the military's war effort, it remains deeply traumatized. Posters of the hostages who remain in Hamas captivity line public streets, and people wear T-shirts calling on leaders to "Bring Them Home."

Gaza will never be the same

Conditions before 7 October were already difficult in Gaza after a stifling blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt following Hamas' takeover in 2007. Today, the territory is unrecognizable.

Experts say the Israeli bombing is among the most intense in modern history. Gaza health authorities say the death toll already has eclipsed 23,000 people, roughly 1% of the Palestinian territory's population. Thousands more remain missing or badly wounded. Over 80% of the population has been displaced, and tens of thousands of people are now crammed into sprawling tent camps on small slivers of space in southern Gaza that also come under Israeli fire. *—PTI*

A view of the rubble of buildings hit by an Israeli air attack on Gaza City on 10 October **PHOTO: AP**

Taliban continues to suppress human rights

KABUL, 13 JAN

Taliban, under its rule in Afghanistan, continues to suppress basic human rights, particularly the rights of women.

According to a newly released report by Human Rights Watch, the Taliban has increased and deepened their suppression of women's rights in Afghanistan. In the report, Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said that 2023 was a year marked by numerous war crimes and violations of human rights around the world. She implored states to honour their pledges to protect human rights.

The report emphasised that the only nation in the world where women are prohibited from attending school is Afghanistan.

The report underlined that the Taliban has stepped up its implementation of oppressive policies in 2023, including suppressing female protestors, arbitrarily detaining female activists. According to Human Rights Watch, the prohibition on women working has cost many Afghan women their livelihoods and has been partially blamed for the country's economic woes. *—ANI*

AMID TENSIONS WITH CHINA

Lai Ching-te elected as new president of Taiwan

According to the Central Election Commission report, William Lai received at least 40% of the vote share **PHOTO: AP**

TAIPEI, 13 JAN

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate William Lai Ching-te has won the much-anticipated Taiwanese Presidential polls and is set to be the next President amid concerns of escalating tensions with China, Taiwan News reported.

This marks the historic third-straight victory for the DPP after Tsai Ing-wena completed her two terms as Taiwan President since 2016. According to the Central Election Commission report, Lai received over 5 million votes and more than 40 per cent of the vote share after counting was done from over 90 per cent of polling stations as of 7:45 pm (local time). Previously undecided voters split three ways among the candidates, giving Lai a seven-point lead over Kuomintang candidate Hou Yu-ih, who received 33 per cent of the total votes. In third place, the Taiwan People's Party candidate Ko Wen-je took 26 per cent of the national vote, performing marginally better than expected, according to Taiwan News.

Lai, who previously served as Tainan's mayor has pledged to continue bolstering national defense, the economy, and cooperation with democratic allies. He also said he would maintain deterrence and uphold the cross-strait status quo, during an election speech.

Lai said he would form a new government staffed by individuals based on their 'capabilities' rather than 'party affiliation". *—ANI*

BLINKEN MEETS JAPANESE AND CHINESE DIPLOMATS

WASHINGTON, 13 JAN

Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait during a meeting with a senior Chinese diplomat on Friday, as the Biden administration seeks to mitigate tensions over Taiwan while the island holds its presidential election.

Blinken sat down with Liu Jianchao, the Chinese Communist Party's international minister. Hours later, he met with Yoko Kamikawa, the foreign minister of Japan, one of the United States' strongest allies in Asia.

The Biden administration is seeking to keep down tensions in the Taiwan Strait if the governing Democratic Progressive Party, known to lean toward independence, shoulwd prevail in Saturday's election. Beijing, which considers Taiwan to be part of Chinese territory, has suggested to voters that they could be choosing between peace and war. *—AP*

SECRET WEDDING

New Zealand's former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern married her longtime partner Clarke Gayford in a private ceremony on Saturday, after cancelling ceremonies during strict Covid-19 controls she imposed on the country **PHOTO: AP**

POLICE RESPOND TO BOMB THREAT AT HOME OF JUDGE IN TRUMP FRAUD TRIAL

NEW YORK, 13 JAN

New York Supreme Court Justice Arthur Engoron received a bomb threat to his Long Island home early Thursday, hours before closing arguments were set to begin in the $370 million civil fraud trial against Donald Trump, his company and others, court spokesman Al Baker said.

"We have been at a heightened security posture for the entirety of the proceedings and that continues," Baker said.

"Additional layers of security will be added out of concern for Justice Engoron."

The Nassau County Police Department confirmed that they were investigating a "swatting" incident that occurred about 5:30 am Thursday at a residence in Great Neck, NY, but declined to provide further details.

The closing arguments in the Trump Organization civil case moved forward as planned Thursday, with only a slight delay.

Engoron entered the courtroom minutes after the proceedings were scheduled to begin at 10 am, and opened by expressing gratitude for the many months of work the attorneys on the case have done.

He did not address the bomb threat to his home.

—Washington Post

12 killed, 23 injured in bus accident in Nepal

KATHMANDU, 13 JAN

- The accident happened on Friday when the bus heading to Kathmandu from Nepalgunj veered off the Rapti bridge in Bhgalubang and plunged into the river

At least 12 people, including two Indians, were killed and 23 others injured after a passenger bus plunged into the Rapti river in Nepal's Lumbini province, according to a media report on Saturday.

The accident happened late night on Friday when the bus heading to Kathmandu from Nepalgunj veered off the Rapti bridge in Bhgalubang and plunged into the river along the East-West Highway, The Kathmandu Post reported.

"Twelve people were killed in the accident after a passenger bus fell into the Rapti River. Two Indians were among the dead," said the report. A total of 23 people were also injured in the accident. "All the injured were rushed to the Nepalgunj Medical Teaching Hospital in Kohalpur for treatment," said the Deputy Inspector of Police Sundar Tiwari. Police said that the reason behind the accident is not yet clear. *—PTI*

10 KILLED IN COAL MINE ACCIDENT IN CHINA

BEIJING, 13 JAN

Local authorities said at least 10 people were killed and six others missing after an accident in a coal mine in central China's Henan Province on early Saturday.

The accident, a likely coal and gas explosion described as an "outburst", happened around 2:55 pm on Friday in Pingdingshan, state broadcaster CCTV said. According to the local government, ten people were killed, state-run China Daily reported. The accident happened in a coal mine of the Pingdingshan Tianan Coal Mining Co, Ltd. A total of 425 people were working underground when the accident took place. *—PTI*

Trump ordered to pay NYT nearly $400,000

NEW YORK, 13 JAN

Donald Trump **PHOTO: AP**

Former President Donald Trump was ordered Friday to pay nearly $400,000 in legal fees to The New York Times and three investigative reporters after he sued them unsuccessfully over a Pulitzer Prize-winning 2018 story about his family's wealth and tax practices.

The newspaper and reporters Susanne Craig, David Barstow and Russell Buettner were dismissed from the lawsuit in May. Trump's claim against his estranged niece, Mary Trump, that she breached a prior settlement agreement by giving tax records to the reporters is still pending. New York Judge Robert Reed said that given the "complexity of the issues" in the case and other factors, it was reasonable that Donald Trump be forced to pay lawyers for the Times and the reporters a total of $392,638 in legal fees.

"Today's decision shows that the state's newly amended anti-SLAPP statute can be a powerful force for protecting press freedom," Times spokesperson Danielle Rhoads Ha said, referring to a New York law that bars baseless lawsuits designed to silence critics. Such lawsuits are known as SLAPPs or strategic lawsuits against public participation. *—AP*

IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Turkey begins airstrikes against Kurdish militants

ISTANBUL, 13 JAN

Turkey carried out airstrikes targeting Kurdish militants in neighbouring Iraq and Syria on Saturday, the Turkish Defence Ministry said. This comes a day after an attack on a Turkish military base in Iraq killed nine Turkish soldiers.

Turkey often launches strikes against targets in Syria and Iraq it believes to be affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a banned Kurdish separatist group that has waged insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s.

The defence ministry said aircraft struck targets Metina, Hakurk, Gara and Qandil in north Iraq, but didn't specify which areas in Syria. It said fighter jets destroyed caves, bunkers, shelters and oil facilities "to eliminate terrorist attacks against our people and security forces ... and to ensure our border security." The statement added "many" militants were "neutralized" in the strikes.

On Friday night, attackers attempted to infiltrate a military base in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region, killing five soldiers. Another four died later of critical injuries. The Turkish defence ministry said 15 militants were also killed.

There was no immediate comment from the PKK, the government in Baghdad or the administration in the semiautonomous northern Kurdish region in Iraq. Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan expressed his condolences on social media platform X.

"We will fight to the end against the PKK terrorist organization within and outside our borders," he wrote. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was to hold a security meeting in Istanbul later Saturday, Fahrettin Altun, the Turkish president's communications director wrote on X. Meanwhile, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced police have detained 113 people suspected of ties to the PKK following raids across 32 Turkish provinces. Three weeks ago, PKK-affiliated militants tried to break into a Turkish base in northern Iraq, according to Turkish officials, leaving six soldiers dead. The following day, six more Turkish soldiers were killed in clashes.

Turkey retaliated by launching strikes against sites that officials said were associated with the PKK in Iraq and Syria. Defence Minister Yasar Guler said at the time that dozens of Kurdish militants were killed in airstrikes and land assaults. It wasn't immediately clear if Friday night's attack and the one three weeks earlier targeted the same base. *—AP*

Ankara frequently carries out cross-border air strikes and operations against the PKK, which has bases in northern Iraq **PHOTO: REUTERS**

- Three weeks ago, PKK-affiliated militants tried to break into a Turkish base in northern Iraq, according to Turkish officials, leaving six soldiers dead

'No proposal to lift export curbs on wheat, rice, sugar'

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said there is no proposal before the government as of now to lift export curbs on wheat, rice and sugar. He also said the country will not import wheat and sugar. "There is no proposal as of now to remove export restrictions on wheat, rice and sugar. And India will not import wheat and sugar," Goyal told reporters. India had banned wheat exports in May 2022, non-basmati rice exports from July 2023 and extended curbs on sugar exports beyond October 2023, as part of measures to control rising domestic prices. *—PTI*

Indian rupee strengthened under Modi govt: Meghwal

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Saturday said the Indian rupee has strengthened during the tenure of the Narendra Modi government. He also credited the role played by BR Ambedkar in taking on the then British rulers who tried to weaken the currency. Talking to reporters here after attending a seminar on the journey of the Indian rupee in the last 100 years, he said during the tenure of PM Narendra Modi, the Indian rupee has gained currency. He said 35 countries have agreed to allow the use of Indian rupee and people travelling there do not have to get it converted into local currency or US dollar. The Union minister pointed out that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was established in April 1935 following the thesis presented by Ambedkar in the London School of Economics on the Indian rupee.*—PTI*

D-Mart's Q3 net profit up 17% at ₹690 cr

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Avenue Supermarts Ltd, which owns and operates retail chain D-Mart, on Saturday, reported a 17 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 690.41 crore for the third quarter ended December 31.The company had posted a net profit of Rs 589.64 crore in the October-December quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by Avenue Supermarts. Its revenue from operations grew 17.31 per cent to Rs 13,572.47 crore during the quarter under review against Rs 11,569.05 crore in the corresponding quarter of the last fiscal. Avenue Supermarts' total expenses rose 17.31 per cent to Rs 12,656.46 crore in the third quarter of this fiscal. Its total income in the December quarter increased 17.28 per cent to Rs 13,605.39 crore. The total number of stores stood at 341 as of December 31, 2023. Meanwhile, in a separate filing, Avenue Supermarts said its board has appointed Harishchandra M Bharuka as an Independent Director of the company. Promoted by Radhakishan Damani and his family, DMart retails basic home and personal products across markets, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, NCR, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Rajasthan. *—PTI*

Ajmera Realty Q3 sales bookings jump 98% to ₹253 cr

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Ajmera Realty and Infra India Ltd's sales bookings nearly doubled to Rs 253 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal on better housing demand. Its sales bookings stood at Rs 128 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing earlier this week. The Mumbai-based company sold 1,03,573 square feet of carpet area during October-December this fiscal against 63,595 square feet in the corresponding period of the previous year. The company sold 3,59,820 square feet of carpet area during the first nine months of this financial year compared to 3,01,010 square feet a year ago. *—PTI*

Red Sea crisis: Commerce min calls meet on 17 Jan

Exporters are apprehensive that the crisis may cause some trade disruption

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The commerce ministry has called a high-level inter-ministerial meeting on 17 January to discuss the way forward on the trade front in the wake of ongoing problems in the Red Sea, a senior official said on Saturday.

Senior officials from five ministries -- external affairs, defence, shipping and finance (department of financial services) and commerce -- will participate in the deliberations. The commerce ministry has also set up an internal strategic group, comprising additional secretaries of the ministry, to discuss global issues impacting the country's trade on a daily basis and prepare a strategy so that India's response can be quick and decisive. "This Wednesday, we are holding an inter-ministerial consultation. We will be discussing the way forward," the official said. The situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to recent attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants.

The ministry has also set up an internal strategic group, comprising additional secretaries of the ministry, to discuss global issues impacting the country's trade on a daily basis ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

Due to these attacks, the shippers are taking consignments through the Cape of Good Hope, resulting in delays of almost 14 days and also higher freight and insurance costs. New trade routes are also being considered and "we will keep exploring our options if the problems at Red Sea escalate," the commerce ministry official added.

The issues being faced by the stakeholders concerned were discussed at a high-level meeting in the commerce ministry on 4 January. Stakeholders, including traders, shippers, container firms, and freight forwarders were present in the meeting.

Exporters are apprehensive that the crisis may cause some trade disruption because the cost of moving it around becomes expensive. "We are watching the situation very closely. There is some cost implication for our exports, but since there are inventories for almost a month only, if it escalates for long then it will be a major problem. We are worried," the official added.The commerce ministry has also asked the ECGC not to increase the export credit interest rates. State-owned ECGC is an export promotion organisation, seeking to improve the competitiveness of Indian exports by providing them with credit insurance covers. *—PTI*

India secures 2nd spot in Asia for most internet exchange pts

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

PHOTO: IANS

According to the Internet Society Pulse Country Report, this marks a significant milestone in India's commitment to adopting advanced technologies and addressing the challenges of a connected world.

An IXP is a physical and usually neutral location where different networks meet to exchange local traffic."In an era where streaming, digital education, and the global work-from-home economy heavily rely on IXPs, their importance cannot be overstated in the context of India, given its growing number of Internet users," said Michuki Mwangi, the Internet Society's Distinguished Technologist, and former CTO of Kenya Internet Exchange Point.

"While India is one of the leaders in Asia, it needs to expand on this good work and deploy more IXPs, encourage the remaining 85 per cent of networks to peer with these, and establish more local data centres, for it to increase the speed and affordability of its Internet services," he added. IXPs have a significant impact on improving the digital capabilities of public services, which is crucial for countries like India.

IXPs promote local content development and provide incentives for local Internet service hosting.

"With an Internet penetration of approximately 67 per cent in a country of 1.3 billion, the number of people who are still digitally disconnected is huge," said Saadia Azim, COO of Bangla Sahayata Kendra, a digital public services platform in West Bengal. *—IANS*

Both the companies Airtel and Jio will likely charge at least 5-10 per cent more for 5G services compared to 4G ***PHOTO: IANS***

Airtel, Jio may soon withdraw unlimited 5G data plan: Report

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel might discontinue their unlimited 5G data plans for premium customers soon, media reports said on Saturday.

As per the analysts, the companies will likely charge at least 5-10 per cent more for 5G services compared to 4G, starting from the second half of 2024, Economic Times reported.

This move is aimed at increasing monetisation and boosting revenue growth. The two telecom operators are also expected to raise mobile tariffs by at least 20 per cent in the September quarter of 2024 to improve their ROI (return on capital employed) of 5G infrastructure investments and customer acquisition costs, according to industry experts.

The other two telecom players Vodafone-Idea and government-owned BSNL are yet to introduce 5G services in the country. Meanwhile, Bharti Airtel in partnership with Ericsson has successfully tested Ericsson's pre-commercial Reduced Capability (RedCap) software on the Airtel 5G network.

Carried out in collaboration with chip-maker Qualcomm using its 5G RedCap test module, the testing on the 5G TDD network represents the first implementation and validation of RedCap in India. Ericsson RedCap is a new radio access network (RAN) software solution that creates new 5G use cases and enables more 5G connections from devices such as smartwatches, other wearables, industrial sensors and AR/VR devices, the company said. *—IANS*

No import limits on some IT products like desktop: DGFT

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The government has clarified that there are no import restrictions on certain IT hardware products such as desktop computers.

In a circular to customs authorities and industry, the commerce ministry arm Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said only the import of laptops, tablets, all-in-one personal computers, ultra small form factor computers and servers is restricted and imports of these goods are allowed against a valid import authorisation. "The given import restriction does not apply to any other goods such as desktop computers, etc, under the tariff head 8471," it said.

In international trade parlance, every product is categorised under an HSN (Harmonised System of Nomenclature) code, or tariff heads. It helps in systematic classification of goods across the globe. HS Code 8471 includes products related to automatic data processing machines and units. It includes a mouse, printers, scanners, and CD drives.

In August 2023, the government imposed restrictions on certain IT hardware goods and later after

PHOTO: X

domestic and foreign firms flagged their concerns, in October last year, it tweaked curbs on imports of laptops and computers and allowed importers to bring in shipments of these hardwares from overseas on a mere 'authorisation' upon detailing quantity and value. The new "import management system" is aimed at monitoring shipments of laptops, tablets and computers into the country without hurting market supply or creating a cumbersome licensing regime. *—PTI*

CES 2024

Robot baristas, AI chefs cause a stir as casino union workers fear for their jobs

LAS VEGAS, 13 JAN

The barista tipped the jug of smooth, foamy milk over the latte, pouring slowly at first, then lifting and tilting the jug like a choreographed dance to paint the petals of a tulip.

Latte art is a skill that can take months if not years of practice to master — but not for this barista powered by artificial intelligence. Robots of all kinds caused a stir on the show floor this week at the annual CES technology trade show in Las Vegas.

It's innovations like this that worry Roman Alejo, a 34-year-old barista at the Sahara hotel-casino on the Las Vegas Strip, who can't help but wonder if the clock is ticking on hospitality jobs in the age of AI. "It is very scary because tomorrow is never promised," he said. "A lot of AI is coming into this world. It is very scary and very eye-opening to see how humans can think of replacing other humans."

The barista tipped the jug of smooth ***PHOTO: AP***

The world's largest tech show put those fears back under the spotlight just a little over a month after the casino workers union in Las Vegas ratified new contracts for 40,000 members, ending a bitter, high-profile fight that called attention to AI's threat to union jobs.

"Technology was a strike issue and one of the very last issues to be resolved," said Ted Pappageorge, the Culinary Workers Union's secretary-treasurer who led the teams that negotiated new five-year contracts, narrowly averting a historic strike at more than a dozen hotel-casinos on the Strip.

Hospitality workers told The Associated Press in interviews over eight months of bargaining that they were willing to take a cut in pay while on strike to win stronger job protection against inevitable advancements in technology. That includes technology already at play at some resorts: self check-in stations, automated valet ticket services and robot bartenders known as "tipsy robots."

Pappageorge said the emergence of robotics in the hospitality and service industry has been on the union's radar for years. The difference now, he told The Associated Press this week, "is the combination of artificial intelligence and robotics." *—AP*

SHOW-CAUSE NOTICES ISSUED

This comes after the government sent show-cause notices for not complying with the country's money laundering laws ***PHOTO: IANS***

Websites of top crypto exchanges blocked in Inida

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The websites of some top global cryptocurrency exchanges like Binance, Kucoin, OKX, among others, were blocked in India on 12January.

This comes after the government sent show-cause notices to these crypto exchanges for not complying with the country's money laundering laws. On 28 December last year, a show-cause notice was sent to Binance, Kucoin, Houbi, Kraken, Gate.io, Bittrex, Bitstamp, MEXC Global, and Bitfinex for operating illegally in India. The notice was issued because these companies failed to register and follow local tax rules, reports Moneycontrol.

As a result, the finance ministry directed the information technology ministry to block their URLs. Binance's Customer Support also confirmed the development on X, saying, "We are aware of an IP block affecting a number of crypto firms, including Binance. This only impacts users who attempt to access the Indian iOS app store or the Binance website from India. Existing users who already have the Binance app are not affected."

"We remain committed to the adherence of local regulations and laws and we are dedicated to maintaining active communication with regulators to ensure user protection and the development of a healthy Web3 industry," it added.

Earlier this week, Apple removed some global cryptocurrency exchanges, including Binance and Kucoin from its App Store in India. *—AP*

ITEES, NAMTECH to build tech edu academies

GANDHINAGAR, 13 JAN

The New Age Makers Institute of Technology (NAMTECH), an education initiative by ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India), has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ITE Education Services (ITEES), a distinguished subsidiary of the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) under the Ministry of Education, Singapore. The Hon'ble Minister of Education, Government of India, graced the momentous occasion and, alongside the CEO - ITEES Singapore, explored the cutting-edge laboratories and engaged with students in a comprehensive tour - all of which left an indelible impression.

As India charts its course to become the third-largest global economy by 2030, the demand for competent technicians in critical sectors like advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, automobiles, energy, etc., has surged to unprecedented levels. This surge has prompted ITEES Singapore and NAMTECH to collaborate in developing a world-class TVET ecosystem in the country, with ITEES Singapore acknowledging NAMTECH as a 'Distinguished Partner.'

At the heart of this first-of-its-kind collaboration for ITEES Singapore is NAMTECH's School for Social Impact, envisioned as a catalyst for change in vocational education and training. The NAMTECH campus in Gandhinagar, equipped with state-of-the-art vocational training laboratories and ITEES Skill Qualification (ISQ) programs, is poised to transform vocational education in India. Enrollment for the inaugural batch of ITI-certified and diploma engineer students for the International Professional Technologists Program (iPTP) commences in March 2024.

ITEES Singapore - with a history of catalysing TVET excellence in states like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam, and more - recognises the imperative for quality training aligned with the tenets of Industry 4.0. Therefore, this collaboration also envisions the co-creation of institutions inspired by ITE Singapore's renowned model, celebrated for TVET excellence worldwide. These institutions aim to elevate the ITI ecosystem, introducing innovative outreach models for an inclusive, nationwide impact. *—ANI*

Asia's biggest ice-skating rink requires attention

SHIMLA, 13 JAN

Surrounded by construction material and shanties, Asia's biggest natural ice-skating rink, a major tourist attraction of 'queen of hills' Shimla, is crying for attention.

The ice-skating rink, which featured in numerous Bollywood movies in the past, narrates a "tale of neglect and unsustainable development" as construction activities in its vicinity and global warming has taken its toll on the skating sessions, which have come down from 100-120 sessions every winter to 30-50 sessions, say old skaters.

It has been a part of numerous Bollywood movies and was visited by several top dignitaries, but now it presents a picture of "unsustainable development and utter neglect", they add. "It is very unfortunate that the government is adamant on finishing the natural skating rink, rather than restoring it or making an all season indoor rink for the residents as well as tourists," says Shimla Hotel and Tourism Stakeholders Association president MK Seth.

This year, Shimla witnessed about 60 per cent tourist footfall, lowest in the last four decades on the New Year, which was on weekend, despite prediction of snow by the weather department. It is high time that the government finds a way to promote tourism, and restoring the ice-skating rink is one of the initiatives that should be taken on priority, he told PTI on Saturday.

A lift is being built outside the skating rink and construction material has been dumped at the site on the land of the sports department, said an old skater, Gurjot.

Even more annoying is the fact that the land of the sports department is being used to dump muck, debris and construction material, said another skater Parth, and added that the proposed construction of a bus stand and a lift would undermine the ecology and micro-environment of the area and jeopardise the rink's future.

The parking area of the rink has been converted into shanties which house dhabas, rickety eateries, stores. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

It was right time to move to Formula E: Jehan Daruvala

MUMBAI, 12 JAN

Indian racer Jehan Daruvala says it's the right time for him to move to Formula E, adding that he has no regrets about spending a few extra years in the junior series for a shot at the elusive Formula 1.Jehan moved to Formula E after spending four years in the F1 feeder series Formula 2, where he was a part of the Red Bull junior team.However, he failed to land a seat in F1. Post Formula 2 stint, the 25-year-old served as a reserve driver for Mahindra Racing in Formula E for a year."In hindsight yes, everything is different. I was pushing to get into Formula 1 for those few years so I don't have any regrets," Jehan told PTI ahead of his debut Formula E race here.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Yuvraj hints at a mentoring role to prepare Team India

KOLKATA, 13 JAN

World Cup-winning hero, Yuvraj Singh on Saturday hinted at a potential mentorship role in the future to mentally prepare the Indian cricket team for the challenges ahead. India has waited endlessly in their quest for an ICC trophy, with the team suffering another defeat in the 2023 World Cup final against Australia last year. India won the Champions Trophy under Mahendra Singh Dhoni in 2013, while their last World Cup triumph came in 2011. "I feel that we have played a lot of finals but not won one. I was part of one of the finals when we lost to Pakistan in 2017," the 42-year-old said while inaugurating 'Yuvraj Centres of Excellence' at Merlin Rise here.—*PTI*

Controversial Morris equalizer stuns Burnley

BURNLEY, 13 JAN

Carlton Morris scored a controversial stoppage-time equalizer as Luton salvaged a 1-1 draw in their crucial clash with relegation rivals Burnley on Friday.Zeke Amdouni netted late in the first half at Turf Moor to give Burnley the lead, but Morris headed Luton level in the closing minutes. Burnley were furious Morris's goal was allowed to stand after a VAR check as Luton's Elijah Adebayo appeared to deliberately block Clarets keeper James Trafford as he tried to catch Alfie Doughty's cross.Trafford was booked for his protest after the goal was allowed to stand.—*AP*

USA defeat India 1-0 in the opening clash

RANCHI, 13 JAN

India made a disastrous start in their campaign in the women's FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers as they went down 0-1 to the United States on the opening night, failing to capitalize on a dozen or so chances.In a high-intensity clash, Abigail Tamer scored the all-important goal for the United States after a goalless first quarter as the hosts dominated possession, had 9 shots on target as compared to five by the US, made 13 circle entries to five by their opponents, and bagged six penalty corners to three by the Americans. But in the end, all that proved futile as the hosts were thwarted by strong defending by the tall and sturdy American players.This defeat could prove a disaster for India, who are hoping to make it to their third successive Olympic Games.—*PTI*

India eye series win over Afghanistan; Kohli to return

Afghanistan is still not counted among the grandstand cricketing feats

INDORE, 13 JAN

A series win over Afghanistan is still not counted among the grandstand cricketing feats, but a clutch of players will be eager to achieve that here on Sunday in the second T20I as it can transform them into contenders from sidekicks.

India had won the first game at Mohali by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead.

It is then imperative for Jitesh Sharma, Washington Sundar, and Axar Patel to produce a defining effort against the Afghans to keep themselves within the selectors' sight as the move to find a perfect squad for the T20 World Cup has gathered steam.

That India will not play aJitesh has all the reasons to place himself among the frontrunners as the wicketkeeper batter has overtaken Ishan Kishan in the pecking order since replacing the latter in the fourth T20I against Australia at Raipur last year. Tilak Varma offers a very similar case.

The left-hander had made an excellent start to his T20I career last year, making 39, 51, and 49 not out against the West Indies in an away three-match series.

All eyes will be on Virat Kohli, who returns to the India squad for the T20I format after a long hiatus of almost 14 months, as India gear up to take on Afghanistan in the second T20I at the Holkar Cricket Stadium in Indore. The Indian team, led by Rohit Sharma, will look to seal a series win after taking a 1-0 lead with a six-wicket victory in Mohali. But since then, Varma has tapered off.

The next 13 innings have produced only one more fifty, against a below-par Bangladesh in the Asian Games, with three 20-plus scores and one 30-plus knock dominating the rest of the outings.

Those numbers are certainly not enough for the 21-year-old to land inside the larger scheme of things, and the effort to turn him into a part-time off-spinner too seemed to be having a feeble life.

However, it remains to be seen whether Varma can retain his place in the side as star batsman Virat Kohli is available for this match after skipping the first game.

—*PTI*

Indian players during first T20I cricket match between against Afghanistan **PHOTO: PTI**

Virat Kohli **PHOTO: PTI**

2nd T20I

Matches won	Matches won
INDIA	AFGHANISTAN
5	0
No Result 1	Match starts at 7.00 PM IST

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty **PHOTO: AP**

Satwik-Chirag one step away from 2nd Super 1000 title

KUALA LUMPUR, 13 JAN

Asian Games gold medallists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Saturday beat world champions Korean pair of Seo Seung Jae and Kang Min Hyukdished in straight games to advance to the Malaysia Open Super 1000 men's doubles final in their first tournament of the season.

The Indian duo ranked second in the world, scripted a remarkable comeback after being down and out in the second game, saving six-game points during an eight-point burst to waltz their way to a 21-18 22-20 win over their Korean opponents in a thrilling semifinal clash.

Satwik and Chirag thus stood just one step away from their second Super 1000 title, having won the first one at the Indonesian Open in June last year.

It was the same Korean pair that the Indians had defeated in the semifinals last June. Overall, Satwik and Chirag now have a 3-1 head-to-head record against world no. 3 Seo and Kang.

The match was marked by short and snappy rallies as Satwik and Chirag showed better anticipation and execution to lead 9-5 in the opening game.

However, a couple of long shots from the Indian pair and some clever stroke play helped the Koreans take four straight points.

Chirag then produced an exceptional return, leaving the Koreans wondering what hit them. Another superb play at the net ensured the Indians a two-point cushion at the break.

The Koreans made it 12-13 after pouncing on a few weak returns from the Indians, who, however, pulled away again to 17-13 with a thunderous smash from Satwik and a flick serve from Chirag.

Seo went for a flick serve to set up a point but went wide twice next to hand four game points to the Indians, who wasted two of them before Seo sprayed one into the net.

In the second game, Seo and Kang were more alert with their defense and focused on placements and they found the gaps on more occasions. They also dominated the flat exchanges to move to 9-4.

Some exciting fast-paced rallies ensued but the Korean pair managed to hold on to an 11-6 lead at the interval.

If Seo looked the better player in the opening game, Kang stepped up in the second and soon the Koreans were six points up at 17-11 in a jiffy as the Indians looked a tad subdued.

Chirag committed a few errors and soon, the Koreans grabbed six game points as a third game looked eminent but then there was a twist in the tale.

Down 14-20, Satwik and Chirag showed nerves of steel as the Koreans looked overcautious and sprayed into the net several times.

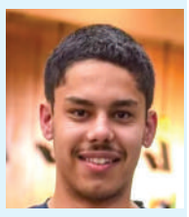
The Indians, on the other hand, rediscovered their touch just in time and they reeled off eight straight points to leave the Koreans stranded.

Satwik and Chirag have been the most successful Indian players in the circuit last year, having won the Asian Games gold, titles in the Asian Championship, Indonesian Super 1000, Korea Super 500, and Swiss Open Super 300.

—*PTI*

Sidhu clinches 17th Paris Olympics spot for India

JAKARTA, 13 JAN



India's Vijayveer Sidhu clinched a 17th Paris Games quota place for the country while winning a silver medal in the men's 25m rapid-fire event at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers here on Saturday. The 21-year-old team bronze-medallist at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year joins senior country-mate Anish Bhanwala in securing a Paris berth in the 25m rapid fire.Anish had bagged the Olympic quota with a bronze medal in the Asian Championship in Changwon, Korea, last year.Vijayveer did not have to wait for a medal to secure a quota place. He earned it by qualifying for the final in fourth place with a score of 577.Four out of the six finalists on Saturday were eligible for quota places and the youngster, who hails from Chandigarh, did it in style by shooting 28 in the elimination round to clinch silver behind Kazakhstan's Nikita Chiryukin, who shot 32 for the gold medal. "I am very very happy. We trained very hard in the camps and also after coming here. —*PTI*

Mayank's century gives K'taka lead over Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 12 JAN

Karnataka skipper Mayank Agarwal played a captain's knock of 109, as his side took a 64-run lead on Day 2 of their Group C Ranji Trophy match against Gujarat here on Saturday.

After bundling out Gujarat for 263 on the opening day, Karnataka is 328 for five, with Manish Pandey unbeaten on 50 and Sujay Sateri on 24. The two have already stitched together a 60-run stand.

Karnataka openers Ravikumar Samarth (60) and Mayank (109) sewed together a 172-run partnership to get their side off to a great start on Saturday.

Mayank brought up his 16th first-class century off 124 deliveries, including 17 fours and a six. Both the openers were unlucky to get dismissed on 172.

Mayank Agarwal**PHOTO: PTI**

However, Devdutt Padikkal (42) and Nikin Jose (22) added 65 more runs before both were dismissed on 238. For Gujarat, Chintan Gaja grabbed two wickets.

In another Group C match in Porvorim, centuries from Suyash Prabhudessai (197) and Deepraj Gaonkar (115 not out) propelled Goa to a massive 618 for seven against Chandigarh.

Goa resumed the day at 267 for three, with Prabhudessai and Darshan Misal (46) adding 104 for the fourth wicket.

Brief scores: In Ahmedabad: Gujarat 264 in 88 overs (Kshitij Patel 95, Umang Kumar 72; Vasuki Koushik 4/49). Karnataka 328/5 in 90 overs (Ravikumar Samarth 60, Mayank Agarwal 109, Manish Pandey 56; Chintan Gaja 2/43). In Porvorim: Goa 618/7 in 160 overs (Suyash Prabhudessai 197, Krishnamurthy Siddharth 77, Deepraj Gaonkar 115 not out, Arjun Tendulkar 80; Jagjit Singh 2/79). Chandigarh 73-1 (Arslan Khan 41; Mohit Redkar 1/18) by 545 runs. In Chandigarh: Railways 343/9 (Pratham Singh 60, Mohammad Saif 50, Upendra Yadav 58, Sahab Yuvraj 68; Siddarth Kaul 3/80). Punjab. In Agartala: Tamil Nadu 122/1 (Vijay Shankar 50 batting; Manisankar Murasingh 1/11) vs Tripura. —*PTI*

AFC Asian Cup: India keep mighty Australia at bay till 50th minute before losing 0-2

AL RAYYAN, 13 JAN

Indian and Australian players fight for the ball during the AFC Asian Cup Group B match **PHOTO:X**

India kept former champions Australia at bay till the 50th minute before eventually losing their AFC Asian Cup football tournament opening group match 0-2 in a gritty performance here on Saturday.

Australia was the overwhelming favorite to win the Group B match and nobody gave India a chance but Igor Stimac's men denied their mighty opponents any success in the first half and then five minutes into the second session, dishing out a superb defensive show.

The Indians, though, ran out of steam later on in the face of waves of attacks from the rampaging Australians, who won the title in 2015 and are ranked 25th in the world as against 102nd of Stimac's team.

Jackson Irvine (50th minute) and Jordan Bros (73rd) scored for Australia to take home the full three points from the match at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium.

India, however, did better than their 0-4 loss to Australia in a group match in the 2011 Asian Cup.

The Indians would not be too disappointed by the margin of loss. Perhaps, they would be happy to have conceded just two goals, which may prove beneficial later on when the third-place team is decided from the group.

Chelsea beat Fulham 1-0

AUCKLAND, 12 JAN

Chelsea beat its west London neighbors Fulham 1-0 on Saturday thanks to a Cole Palmer penalty that earned the Blues its third Premier League win in a row, even if coach Mauricio Pochettino's men still looked labored in front of goal. Palmer sent Bernd Leno the wrong way with his spot kick in the dying moments of the first half after Raheem Sterling was brought down by Issa Diop's trailing foot.

It was Palmer's ninth league goal since joining the Blues from Manchester City as a last-minute summer signing and quickly establishing himself as Chelsea's most dangerous player. Fulham's best chance for an equaliser fell to Raul Jimenez whose shot forced Djordje Petrovic into a one-handed save in the 73rd minute. Chelsea captain Conor Gallagher smacked the post with a shot from the outside of his boot in the 83rd minute.

One of the biggest cheers came when Ben Chilwell was sent on from the Chelsea bench, marking the England defender's return from injury and potentially solving the Blue's left-back problem which centre-half Levi Colwill has struggled to fix.

The win pushed Chelsea up two places in the league table to eighth, above Manchester United and Newcastle United who both have a game in hand over the Blues. —*AP*

Jiri Lehecka wins his first ATP Tour title in Adelaide

ADELAIDE, 13 JAN

Jiri Lehecka **PHOTO: X**

Jiri Lehecka came from behind to claim his first ATP tour title with a 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 victory over Briton Jack Draper in an absorbing final at the Adelaide International on Saturday.The Czech reached the quarterfinals of the Australian Open last year and will be battle-hardened for his third trip to Melbourne Park after the tight two-hour contest against fellow 22-year-old Draper.A single service break was enough to give lefthander Draper the opening set but Lehecka levelled up the contest when he managed the second of the match to snatch the second stanza.That appeared to knock a bit of the stuffing out of Draper, who was also seeking his maiden tour title, and Lehecka raced to a 3-0 lead in the decider. —*AP*

NEW FACE IN THE INDIA SQUAD

Dhruv Jurel for the first two Tests against England

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The selectors on Friday stuck to the tried and tested names while announcing the India team for the first two Tests against England with wicketkeeper-batsman Dhruv Jurel being the lone new face.

Rohit Sharma will lead the 16-man side while Jasprit Bumrah will be his deputy.

Senior pacer Mohammed Shami was not named in the squad as he is continuing his recovery process from an injury that he suffered during the ODI World Cup last year.

Shami was also not a part of the India squad that toured South Africa recently.

Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna was also not considered as he also picked up a left quadricep injury during the Ranji Trophy match against Gujarat on this day.

Pace bowling all-rounder Shardul Thakur also missed out but left-arm spinner Axar Patel made an expected comeback to the side.

However, the inclusion of Uttar Pradesh player Jurel headlined the selection.

The 22-year-old was a part of the India A squad that played two matches against their South African counterparts in December last year. He had made a 69 in a first-round group game of the Ranji Trophy at Alappuzha.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Dhruv Jurel being the lone new face **PHOTO: PTI**

- The selectors on Friday stuck to the tried and tested names while announcing the India team for the first two Tests against England with wicketkeeper-batsman Dhruv Jurel being the lone new face.

Jurel, who made his First-Class debut last year against Vidarbha, has so far made 790 runs from 15 matches at an average of 46 with a hundred and five fifties in the domestic circuit.

However, KS Bharat could be the first-choice wicketkeeper batter and the selectors have also named KL Rahul for the role.

Rahul had donned the big gloves in the two Test matches against South Africa with a fair amount of success.

But it is unlikely that the Bengaluru man could continue in the role against England as India is certain to field three spinners in Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, and Axar, a move that warrants a specialist behind the stumps.

The first Test will be played at Hyderabad from January 25 and the second match will be held at Visakhapatnam from February 2.

India Test squad for the first two Tests against England: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah (vice-captain), Avesh Khan.

—*PTI*